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Summer 2000

WELCOME to a bumper edition of *World Soccer*, an issue in which we have done our utmost to bring you the best possible coverage of the European Championship finals.

We have spoken to every Euro 2000 coach and given equal coverage to all 16 finalists. To do the tournament justice we have almost doubled the size of the regular magazine. Unfortunately, we have also had to increase the cover price, but as with previous special editions, subscribers have not been charged extra.

You'll also be able to follow the tournament every day at our website, www.worldsoccer.com. Unlike the rash of football-related internet businesses that have sprung up in recent months, all claiming to be the greatest thing since the invention of the wheel, worldsoccer.com will be focusing solely on Euro 2000. Visit www.worldsoccer.com for live match reports, news and comment from our accredited journalists at the heart of the action in Belgium and Holland.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor (gavin_hamilton@ipc.co.uk)

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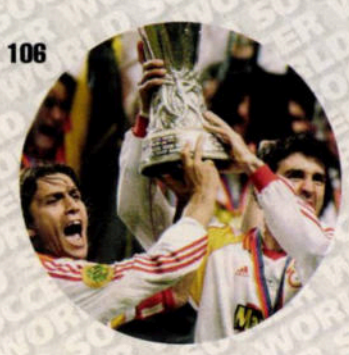

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DALLAS CUP XXI
Presented by FILA

Technique still at a premium

Paul Gardner reports on the Dallas Cup

IN the Dallas Cup's 21st edition, the under-19 Super Group – which features mostly pro clubs – went, as it did last year, to Corinthians of Brazil. That was something of a surprise because Corinthians had opened the tournament by losing 1-0 to the Comets, a local team from Dallas.

So rare is it for an American team to win a game in the Super Group – they are, after all, youth clubs playing against pro clubs – that it was immediately assumed Corinthians could not be very good.

Not so. The Brazilians did not lose again, getting stronger with each game. Even so, there was a pronounced tinge of luck about their win in the Final, against Monterrey. The Mexicans played the better football but were let down by poor finishing when the game came down to a penalty shoot-out.

This was almost a showcase for the Mexicans' futility in these matters – they missed their first three kicks, Corinthians converted all theirs, and the shoot-out was over in record time.

Actually, the Mexicans did not 'miss'. All three – two of them pretty good efforts – were saved by Rubinho, the same keeper whose shoot-out save against Australia had sealed Brazil's triumph at the Under-17 World Cup in New Zealand last year.

Champions again...Corinthians celebrate

Monterrey's disappointment was sweetened by a victory for their club in the under-12 division. A victory for excellent football. Weight for weight, height for height, these little kids played some of the best football of the tournament. They were always looking to use the ball, to pass to feet, to move intelligently.

None of Monterrey's youngsters was better to watch than Arturo Alvarado, scorer of the winning goal, whose dribbling skills included a sequence of five soft touches with his head – on the run! – and a superbly executed 'sombrero', the trick of beating an opponent by lifting the ball just over his head.

Mexican sides dominated the tournament. Of the 12 teams in the six final games, eight were Mexican. In addition to the under-12 title, two other trophies – the under-14 and the regular under-19 groups – went south of the border, back to Mexico.

And so the mystery – and the wait – goes on: why is it that Mexico, year after year, produces excellent youth teams, but consistently fails to make the grade at the top level?

It is a question that Mexicans themselves ponder and fail to answer. Interestingly, the opinion was expressed on a number of occasions in Dallas that the success of Necaxa in the World Club Championship earlier this year might prove to be the confidence-builder that Mexican professional football appears to need.

The Mexican success at Dallas Cup XXI, plus Brazilian wins in the Super Group and the under-17s, meant that Chicago Sockers, winners of the under-16 title, were the only non-Latin winners.

Strong European teams were in short supply this year, a gap that tournament director Bill Stroube acknowledged, and attributed to the Euro's low exchange-rate.

Whatever, this was a highly unusual situation. At most international youth tournaments, European teams far outnumber the Latin Americans.

West Ham United, the only European team in the Super Group, were knocked out in the quarter-finals by the Brazilians from Capixaba – certainly not one of the more fashionable teams.

West Ham at least had the satisfaction of having beaten finalists Monterrey in their group. But the 2-1 scoreline hid the reality. West Ham coach Tony Carr acknowledged that with a brutally honest assessment: "We were totally outplayed."

In short, technique continues to be a problem for English – probably for most European – teams. Carr also pointed out, after a 1-1 draw with Santa Anita Heat of California, that "the technique of some of their players was better than our boys. The game in England is so fast, there's so much pressure, maybe technique is not allowed to develop."

High hurdles...Corinthians meet Monterrey

One curious contradiction in the Dallas Cup concerned the referees – who, unlike the teams, were mostly European and included Kim Milton Nielsen, the lofty Dane who sent off David Beckham during France 98.

Inevitably, a number of all-Latin games were refereed by Europeans. Not a happy state of affairs. One such game, with an English referee, featured seven yellow cards and one red – yet it is difficult to recall a single bad foul or any serious incident.

It almost seemed as though the European referees went in with the notion that 22 Latins (probably hot-blooded Latins, at that) on the field represented a violent brawl waiting to happen. Hence all the whistles and cards.

When asked whether a referee would officiate differently for European and Latin teams, Nielsen replied with a firm No. Which he later undermined by saying that allowances had to be made for the players' temperament.

DALLAS CUP 2000 RESULTS

UNDER-19 SUPER GROUP:
Corinthians (Bra) 0 Monterrey (Mex) 0 (*Corinthians 3-0 on pens*).
UNDER-19 FINAL:
Tigres (Mex) 2 CD Guadalajara (Mex) 0.
UNDER-17 FINAL:
Uniao Bandeirante (Bra) 2 CD Guadalajara (Mex) 1.
UNDER-16 FINAL:
Chicago Sockers (USA) 5 Santos Laguna (Mex) 3.
UNDER-14 FINAL:
Tigres (Mex) 2 Vaqueros (Mex) 0.
UNDER-12 FINAL:
Monterrey (Mex) 1 CASL Caps Red (USA) 0.

TRANSFERS

PLAYER		FROM	TO
Miroslav BARANEK	M	Sparta Prague	Koln
Roman BEREZOVSKY	G	Zenit St Petersburg	Saint-Etienne
Jean-Marc CHANELET	D	Nantes	Lyon
Stephane DALMAT	M	Marseille	Paris SG
Cristian DIAZ	D	Independiente	Udinese
Sylvain DISTIN	D	Gueugnon	Paris SG
Regis DORN	F	Strasbourg	Freiburg
Yiotis ENGOMITIS	F	Anorthosis	PAOK Salonika
Marc-Vivien FOE	M	West Ham	Lyon
Petr GABRIEL	D	Sparta Prague	Kaiserslautern
Tomas GALASEK	M	Willem II	Ajax
Dimitrios GRAMMOZIS	M	Hamburg	Kaiserslautern
Besnik HASI	M	Genk	Anderlecht
Sigurdur JONSSON	D	Dundee United	AK Akranes
KIM Do-keun	M	Chunnam Dragons	Verdy Kawasaki
Georgi KINKLADZE	M	Ajax	Derby
Dietmar KUHBAUER	M	Real Sociedad	Wolfsburg
Vratislav LOKVENC	F	Sparta Prague	Kaiserslautern
Mickael MADAR	F	Paris SG	released
Dejan MITROVIC	F	Westerlo	Mouscron
Yiannakis OKKAS	F	Anorthosis	PAOK Salonika
Alexander PANOV	F	Zenit St Petersburg	Saint-Etienne
Serhii REBROV	F	Kyiv Dynamo	Tottenham
Jacques REMY	F	Martigues	Strasbourg
Stephane RODA	M	Gueugnon	Strasbourg
TAYFUN Korkut	M	Fenerbahce	Real Sociedad
Yves VANDERHAEGHE	M	Mouscron	Anderlecht
Petr VLCEK	D	Slavia Prague	Standard Liege

Antic fired again

Ousted...Raddy Antic

COACHES ON THE MOVE

Raddy Antic's third spell at Atletico Madrid ended shortly after the club had been relegated. He was sacked following a dispute over a new deal, having said only the week before that he would be in charge next season.

Elsewhere in Spain, **Guus Hiddink** was fired by Real Betis as the side headed, like Atletico, towards the Second Division. The former Holland coach had been in charge for just three months.

Andoni Goikoetxea quit as coach of Numancia despite managing to keep the club safe from relegation after their first season in the Spanish top flight. He said a lack of resources was the principal reason behind his decision. Goikoetxea's replacement is **Paco Herrera**, who takes over for the second time.

Valladolid, meanwhile, fired **Gregorio Manzano**, who led the side to finish eighth this season.

SV Ried coach **Heinz Hochhauser** is to take over at Austria Wien, who recently sacked Herbert Prohaska.

In Japan, lowly Kawasaki Frontale fired Brazilian manager **Zeca**, who guided the club to promotion last season. The new man is former assistant **Toshiaki Imai**.

Guatemala coach **Carlos Miloc** stepped down following his team's failure to progress automatically for the next stage of the North and Central American section of the World Cup 2002 qualifying campaign.

COACHES STAYING ON

Czech Republic national coach **Jozef Chovanec** has signed a new two-year deal which will take him up to the 2002 World Cup finals

La Coruna boss **Javier Irureta** has extended his contract by a year. It was due to run out this summer.

John Gregory has agreed a new three-year deal with Aston Villa.

Slavia Prague have added two years to their deal with **Frantisek Cipro**.

PLAYERS STAYING ON

Manchester United full-back **Denis Irwin** and forward **Teddy Sheringham** have both signed new one-year contracts with the club.

At Newcastle, **Nikos Dabizas** has agreed a new four-year deal.

In Scotland, **Jorg Albertz** has signed a new three-year contract with Rangers after months of speculation that he might be leaving the club.

Veteran international forward **Ulf Kirsten** has extended his stay at Bayer Leverkusen by a year.

OUT OF ACTION

In Russia, CSKA forward **Artyom Yenin** tore knee ligaments during the Cup Final, a 3-2 victory for Lokomotiv, and will miss the rest of the season.

Former Spanish international **Julio Salinas** has announced his retirement from the game. The 37-year-old, who won 56 caps for his country, scoring 22 times, played for Alaves during his final season in La Liga.

Austrian international **Toni Polster** has also decided to call it a day. He made his announcement to retire after his club, Salzburg, were beaten in the Austrian Cup Final.

OTHER NEWS

Two goals from Roberto Baggio helped secure **Internazionale**'s

New deal...Jorg Albertz

place in the qualifying phase of next season's Champions League. The 33-year-old scored a goal in each half of the play-off against Parma, staged in order to determine which of the two sides would go into Europe's top competition. Inter and Parma tied for fourth place in Serie A, on 58 points, thus forcing the extra tie.

Baggio put his side ahead after 35 minutes, and added another after Mario Stanic had brought the score back to 1-1. Inter sub Ivan Zamorano made it 3-1 in injury time.

Monaco midfielder **Marcelo Gallardo** was voted Player of the Season by his fellow professionals in France. Team-mate Philippe Christanval was named Best Young Player.

Manchester United's **Roy Keane** was named England's Player of the Year by the Football Writers' Association.

Journalists in Scotland gave their Footballer of the Year award to Rangers midfielder **Barry Ferguson**. **Mark Viduka** of Celtic was earlier named the Players' Player of the Year.

Marc Degryse took the Belgian Footballer of the Year award for the fourth time, at the age of 34.

UEFA EURO 2000

Quietly confident

Kevin Keegan's chances are good, but not that good, says Gavin Hamilton

ENGLAND prepared for Euro 2000 in a mood of cautious optimism. No flag-waving, no tub-thumping, no German-baiting. Just an honest recognition that, with a little luck, they could reach the later stages of the tournament.

The less than impressive qualifying campaign, which England began under Glenn Hoddle and ended with Kevin Keegan in charge, has dampened any hopes that the national team would start among the favourites. They struggled in a qualifying group won comfortably by Sweden, producing a series of poor results which ultimately contributed to Hoddle's departure as coach.

Keegan did not fare much better. A 3-1 win over Poland, with a hat-trick from Paul Scholes, improved morale, but draws with Sweden and Bulgaria left England dependent on Sweden beating Poland just to reach the play-offs.

England made heavy work of the two-legged decider against Scotland, even after two goals from Scholes (again) put them in the driving seat.

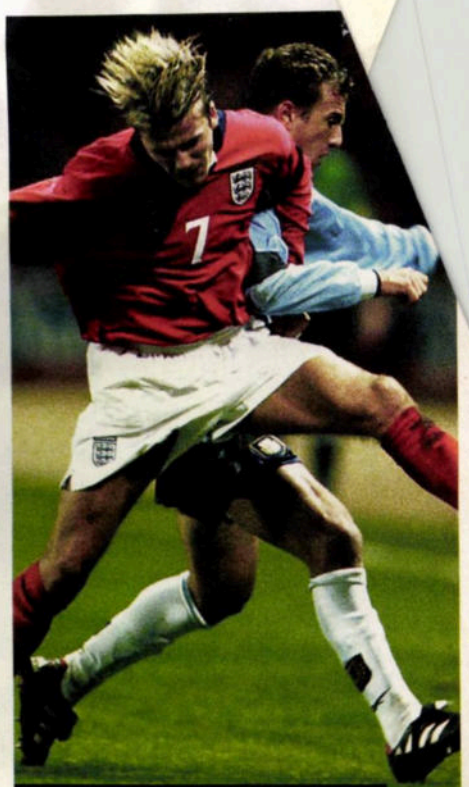
Since then, England have not seen enough friendly action to make any reliable assessment of their chances in Holland and Belgium. No matches were organised for March 29 or April 26, when virtually all the other Euro 2000 finalists were in action. The fear of upsetting Manchester United and their busy schedule still runs deep at FA headquarters in Lancaster Gate.

But with the domestic season finally out of the way, Keegan was able to concentrate on preparing his squad for two Wembley friendlies, against Brazil and Ukraine. The 28-man preliminary squad was due to be whittled down to 22 on May 31 before the party set off for Malta and a final friendly on June 3.

The time Keegan spends with his players between then and the first match, against Portugal in Eindhoven on June 12, will be crucial. The more the coach can foster a healthy team spirit and convince the players of his tactical plans, the better.

'The big doubt over Keegan concerns his tactical judgment. His experience of big-match situations is limited'

In England's favour is the strength of the team's spine, which oozes quality. Alan Shearer, like so many great strikers, is more than capable of rising to the occasion, just as he did four years ago when he finished as top scorer at Euro 96 after going for months without a goal. David Beckham, meanwhile, has a chance to prove the claims of many that he is the best midfielder in Europe.



Point to prove...David Beckham

Moreover, Keegan, unlike many of the other Euro 2000 coaches, has a lot of good young talent to choose from.

The big doubt over the coach concerns his tactical judgment. Keegan's experience of big-match situations is limited, to say the least. He certainly has the players at his disposal to reach the semi-finals but it remains to be seen whether he can adapt to the changing demands of a tournament in which one slip can prove fatal.

The staff that Keegan has assembled around him – Arthur Cox, Derek Fazackerly – are respected coaches in their own right, but their experience of major international tournaments is, like Keegan's, limited.

The opening match against the Portuguese could prove to be the hardest of England's group. Inevitably, much attention – too much attention – has focused on the meeting with Germany in Charleroi. But the Germans, whose problems have been well documented, should hold no fears this time around.

The talent is there. Now it's over to you, Kevin.

mp to it...Paul Scholes heads his second goal in the play-off first leg against Scotland

★ Star Man
Alan Shearer

ENGLAND captain Alan Shearer insists he will not go back on his stated intention to quit international football after Euro 2000. "I have made the decision to retire for the right reasons and I won't be changing my mind," he says.

"I have had some great days with the national team and hopefully the best are still to come."

Shearer's announcement that he wanted to quit while he is ahead, and hopefully on a high, was greeted with some suspicion by the English media.

Despite his goalscoring record, 29-year-old Shearer is not without his detractors. He was accused of engineering the timing of his announcement to secure his place in England's 22-man party for the finals. After all, he had not had the best of times at his club, Newcastle, under Ruud Gullit.

Manchester United striker Andy Cole was especially bitter, accusing Shearer of being given preferential treatment by Keegan, and winning some of his caps on reputation alone when his form did not warrant selection. Cole complained: "There are too many good centre-forwards in England to say you can only work with one person."

And Shearer's salt-of-the-earth image – "I'm just the son of a sheet-metal worker" was his famous comment after signing for Newcastle, his hometown club – conflicts with the multi-million pound endorsements.

But when push comes to shove – something Shearer likes to do quite a lot – he does one thing better than anybody else: score goals.

He seemed to benefit more than most from the departure of Gullit from Newcastle last autumn and the founding of a more inspirational regime by fellow Geordie Bobby Robson. Despite the club's mediocre season, he finished with 34 goals in League and Cups, four more than Premiership top scorer Kevin Phillips.

Kevin Keegan, who, while manager of Newcastle, broke the British transfer record in signing Shearer for £15 million after Euro 96, believes that his captain is more than capable of rising to the big occasion and can again finish as the tournament's top scorer.

Shearer plays the captain's role to perfection when asked about Euro 2000.

"I don't see why we can't win it," he says. "We have a lot of good quality players in this country and the public should get behind us and believe we can do very well.

"But, as I always say, talk is cheap and we have to go out and prove that we can match the best sides in Europe."

Gavin Hamilton

Final countdown...Alan Shearer

ENGLAND

How they line up

KEVIN KEEGAN announced a 28-man squad for the friendlies against Brazil and Ukraine at Wembley, from which he will select a final 22. Aston Villa goalkeeper **David James** and Everton's all-purpose midfielder/attacker **Nick Barmby** were the surprise choices.

Of the four goalkeepers, James is likely to miss the final cut. **David Seaman** is still the No 1 choice, despite injuries and loss of form over the past 18 months, with **Nigel Martyn** his understudy and Ipswich's **Richard Wright** as third-choice.

The major tactical dilemma is whether to play 4-4-2 or 3-5-2. Keegan's instinct is to play with a back four, but a lack of quality full-backs, particularly on the left, should force his hand.

Tony Adams, **Martin Keown** and **Sol Campbell** are the first-choice centre-backs, with Campbell switching to left-back in a back four and **Gary Neville** coming in at right-back. **Gareth Southgate** and **Rio Ferdinand** provide central defensive cover, while **Philip Neville** is an option at left-back or in midfield.

In a five-man midfield, **David Beckham** will play wide on the right, delivering his trademark crosses, corners and free-kicks. Much will be expected of **Paul Scholes** playing behind the two main strikers. His goals were crucial – a hat-trick against Poland and two against Scotland – in securing England's place in the finals.

Paul Ince has returned to favour following David Batty's injury, and will play the central midfield holding role. If **Dennis Wise** can curb his aggressive tendencies, the team will benefit from his range of passing.

Steven Gerrard has had a meteoric rise at Liverpool this season and will surely come into contention. **Jamie Redknapp** has suffered as Gerrard's star has risen, but he is arguably England's best passer of the ball. **Ray Parlour** is a solid option on the right if Beckham moves inside. **Kieron Dyer** can play at right wing-back or in midfield.

On the left, the lack of naturally left-footed players has given Keegan a problem. **Steve McManaman's** good form for Real Madrid in the Champions League has strengthened his case, but there are doubts about his defensive commitment. **Jason Wilcox** would provide a more solid option on the left, while Keegan clearly believes that Barmby, although notionally an attacker, can provide an alternative in midfield.

> 'Keegan's instinct is to play with a back four, but a lack of quality full-backs should force his hand'

In attack, it is a question of who partners **Alan Shearer**. **Michael Owen** is the obvious choice, but he has been troubled by hamstring injuries for the past 18 months and is only now returning to the sort of form which delighted the world at France 98.

Keegan may prefer to use Owen as a substitute and start with **Emile Heskey**, whose physical presence would help Shearer.

Robbie Fowler is a major doubt, having only just returned from injury, but if fit he will be preferred ahead of **Kevin Phillips** and **Andy Cole**. Both Phillips and Cole have had excellent seasons for their clubs, but lack experience on the international stage.

Squad pool

	Club	Age	Caps	Gls
GOALKEEPERS				
David JAMES	Aston Villa	29	1	0
Nigel MARTYN	Leeds	33	11	0
David SEAMAN	Arsenal	36	56	0
Richard WRIGHT	Ipswich	22	0	0
DEFENDERS				
Tony ADAMS	Arsenal	33	62	4
Sol CAMPBELL	Tottenham	25	30	0
Rio FERDINAND	West Ham	21	9	0
Martin KEOWN	Arsenal	33	28	1
Gary NEVILLE	Manchester United	25	36	0
Philip NEVILLE	Manchester United	23	23	0
Gareth SOUTHGATE	Aston Villa	29	33	1
MIDFIELDERS				
Nick BARMBY	Everton	26	10	3
David BECKHAM	Manchester United	25	28	1
Kieron DYER	Newcastle	21	4	0
Steven GERRARD	Liverpool	20	0	0
Paul INCE	Middlesbrough	32	48	2
Steve McMANAMAN	Real Madrid (Spa)	28	26	2
Ray PARLOUR	Arsenal	27	6	0
Jamie REDKNAPP	Liverpool	26	16	1
Paul SCHOLES	Manchester United	25	21	9
Jason WILCOX	Leeds	28	3	0
Dennis WISE	Chelsea	33	14	1
FORWARDS				
Andy COLE	Manchester United	28	7	0
Robbie FOWLER	Liverpool	25	11	2
Emile HESKEY	Liverpool	22	5	0
Michael OWEN	Liverpool	20	18	4
Kevin PHILLIPS	Sunderland	26	3	0
Alan SHEARER	Newcastle	29	57	28

The view from England

Patrick Barclay
Sunday Telegraph

"I'd be very surprised if England don't reach the semi-finals. In the past they have gone into tournaments as if they have been got at by sports psychologists, believing they are better than they really are. They won't be like that this time, and that will help against Germany.

"But England are certainly not poor relations. They are much stronger than they realise. Alan Shearer could be a huge success; he's back to his peak in the domestic game. And class always rises to the top.

"England will be good at scoring goals and stopping them. In Adams, Keown and Campbell, they have three centre-backs who will be very hard to get past. With the creative players, Beckham is at a good age, 25, while England would not be in the finals were it not for the goals of Scholes. And then there's McManaman.

"My only reservation is whether Keegan is tactically astute enough. I have a fear that he will try to play 4-4-2 with a diamond midfield.

FOLLOW THE TOURNAMENT WITH WORLD

England are strong in every department except full-back. But if you play with three defenders, you don't need full-backs."

Brian Glanville
"We've always known that Keegan is no tactical genius, but we've also known of his strength as an inspirational manager. England will give a perfectly good account of themselves but I can't see them winning the tournament.

"A lot will depend on whether Owen and Adams are fit. A player like Dyer could have quite an effect, he's got such vitality. Gerrard could also come through and Heskey could do an enormous amount of damage.

"But the trump card could be McManaman, who has come on strong this season. We're seeing a new McManaman, the best we've ever seen. Keegan has got to go with his strengths, say 'Sod it!' and play McManaman in a central role."

For the record

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

GROUP 5

05.09.98	Sweden-England	2-1
10.10.98	England-Bulgaria	0-0
14.10.98	Luxembourg-England	0-3
27.03.99	England-Poland	3-1
05.06.99	England-Sweden	0-0
09.06.99	Bulgaria-England	1-1
04.09.99	England-Luxembourg	6-0
08.09.99	Poland-England	0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sweden	8	7	1	0	10	1	22
England*	8	3	4	1	14	4	13
Poland	8	4	1	3	12	8	13
Bulgaria	8	2	2	4	6	8	8
Luxembourg	8	0	0	8	2	23	0

**England qualified for the play-offs as runners-up*

PLAY-OFFS

13.11.99	Scotland-England	0-2
17.11.99	England-Scotland	0-1

England 2-1 on agg. Qualified for finals

OTHER RESULTS SINCE SUMMER 1999

10.10.99	England-Belgium (friendly)	2-1
23.02.00	England-Argentina (friendly)	0-0

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS RECORD

1960	Did not enter
1964	1st round (no qualifying stage)
1968	3rd place
1972	Quarter-finalists
1976	Did not qualify
1980	Group stage
1984	Did not qualify
1988	Group stage
1992	Group stage
1996	Semi-finalists

QUESTIONS TO THE COACH
Kevin Keegan

Who are your favourites to win Euro 2000?
That's a tough one. I say a different team every time I am asked that question because there are so many good teams in the tournament. But France are the world champions and they look very strong.

Who will be the star players?
We've got a fair few in the England team. But Thierry Henry could be the one. He's still so young.

Who will be the surprises?
The Czech Republic did fantastically in the qualifiers and they are second in the world rankings, so they could be the team to spring a surprise.

How do you rate the chances of your team? What stage can they reach?
It's my target to try to do what no English coach has ever done: win a major tournament on foreign soil. My main concern is that everyone is talking about the meeting with Germany and ignoring the games with Portugal and Romania. Portugal are a dangerous team with some terrific attackers. But if we win our opening game against them, it sets us up for the whole tournament.

We have a lot of good young players in the England team. If you look at Germany, they only have the lad from Berlin [Sebastian Deisler], while Portugal and Romania don't have any key players under the age of 23 or 24.

Left-sided...Phil Neville

Are you happy with your preparations?
Yes, we're well prepared. We've crossed the t's and dotted the i's. The team behind the team is big, about 40 staff, and I've asked people like Stuart Pearce and Peter Beardsley to stay with us at the hotel. I'm looking forward to being able to spend some time with the players.

The downside of international football is that you never have any time with the players. Against Argentina in February the players arrived on Sunday and 12 of them had played that day. They couldn't do much on the Monday so we really only had one day to train properly. We drew 0-0 but there was a lot that was good about the performance.

I don't regret not playing matches in March and April because Scotland and Ireland had so many withdrawals that the teams weren't recognisable. We deliberately picked tough teams in Argentina, Brazil and Ukraine for the warm-up games.

What would you suggest to the referees?
I would just say let the games flow. There are going to be so many great attacking players in this tournament that they need to be given a chance to play. From what I've seen this season, I think the referees will do this.

What will be the tactical habits of the tournament?
One of the other coaches said last week that he thought it will be a low-scoring tournament with teams playing defensively. I think the opposite will happen, because almost every team has great attacking potential.

Do you think hooliganism will create problems?
I hope not, I really do. But players read the papers and they can be affected by it. It's my job to ensure that people talk about the football. I can't control the outside things.

Is it really true that you will not be practising penalties?
No, I never said that. I was misquoted by one newspaper [*Daily Mail*] when I said that we would not be practising penalties before the Germany game because the match will not go to penalties. What I have always said is that you cannot recreate a match situation on the training ground. You cannot recreate the situation in which those Arsenal players walked up in front of the Galatasaray fans.

Are you worried about the lack of left-footed options? If you lose Phil Neville, who plays at left-back?
Well, losing Graeme Le Saux and Stuart Pearce was a blow, but I looked at the other players and decided I could not pick them just for having a left foot. We may have to play three at the back, but if you look at the 22, I've got lots of options.

UEFA EURO 2000

Hrubesch on rescue mission

The disorganised Germans are facing problems at every turn, says Keir Radnedge

Critical voice...Lothar Matthaus

HORST HRUBESCH knows all about winning European Championships – which is a good job. Germany's new assistant coach will need to call on all the experience and know-how he possesses if the reigning champions are to go anywhere near a successful defence of the trophy secured by Oliver Bierhoff's historic golden goal against the Czech Republic at Wembley in 1996.

Indeed, the story of Germany's progress to the finals in neighbouring Holland and Belgium has more closely resembled the usual Dutch style – with an increasingly opinionated and bitter stream of recriminations pouring forth from players and coaching staff.

The low point was reached at the start of May when national coach Erich Ribbeck sacked Uli Stielike as right-hand man and called up Hrubesch, who scored the two goals with which West Germany beat Belgium in the 1980 Final in Rome.

Stielike, a former national team-mate of Hrubesch in both 1980 and at the 1982 World Cup, always finds difficulty in concealing his contempt for those who do not share his opinions or bend to his style. When he began to reveal, publicly, that he had such a problem with Ribbeck, it was the beginning of the end of an always-shaky partnership.

Of course, Stielike has not been alone in his criticism of Ribbeck's campaign. Veteran sweeper Lothar Matthaus had his say before flying off to semi-retirement in Major League Soccer, Stefan Effenberg refused to get involved at all and Jens Jeremies was banned for a game after describing preparations and morale as "pathetic".

If Germany flop in a manner comparable to their group stage dismissal from the 1984 finals in France, then Ribbeck will carry the can. But he will be the least to blame. First in the firing line should be his bosses in the German federation (the DFB) who have been allowing coaching and youth development work to mark time amid the complacency generated by the national team's status as record three-times European champions and three-times World Cup winners.

Then again, the DFB might have saved a lot of trouble if president Egidius Braun had gently let Berti Vogts go after the 1998 World Cup. Vogts had worked hard and honestly as national coach but had run out of time and had no new inspiration to offer.

Waiting until the autumn, when all prospective candidates were signed off into the club season, left Braun – ultimately – with no alternative but to bring Ribbeck out of retirement. Not the ideal calling card for a national leader.

Ribbeck also has been shocked to discover the lack of depth of young talent. When Vogts had raised the issue, fans, officials and media thought he was merely making excuses. Now the pigeons are coming home to roost.

The more prescient of German observers at the 1998 World Cup, such as Leverkusen coach Christoph Daum and the idiosyncratic ex-Bayern hero Paul Breitner, had warned that Germany had nobody to compare in potential with, for example, England's Michael Owen, David Beckham and Sol Campbell. Now the evidence is clear. Why else would Ribbeck continue with Matthaus, consider an appeal to Effenberg and keep scratching his head over injury-scarred little Thomas Hassler, who won the last of his 97 caps two years ago?

'If Germany flop, coach Erich Ribbeck will carry the can – but he will be the least to blame'

International football is a young man's game. It's fine to have a smattering of veterans but they need talented youngsters to carry them through a three-week programme of half a dozen games in the summer heat. Germany have too many veterans and not enough kids; qualifying for the finals of Euro 2000 only glossed over the painful truth.

Germany began the qualifying campaign badly with a 1-0 defeat in Turkey but then won six games in a row, with Bierhoff hitting a hat-trick in a 6-1 win over Moldova in Leverkusen. In the end the Germans needed only to avoid a home defeat by Turkey in Munich to ensure they topped qualifying Group 3. They managed it – but only just.

England will never have a better chance to beat Germany than in Charleroi on June 17. Defeat then would disturb Germany's approach to the World Cup qualifier at Wembley in October.

Germany have so much at stake – and whether they retain the European crown is almost the least of it.

★ Star Man
Oliver Kahn

OLIVER KAHN is not one of those Germans who think their national team is going to Euro 2000 merely to make up the numbers. Bayern Munich's 30-year-old captain and goalkeeper, believes not just in taking part but in winning: it has been his thinking ever since he launched his career as an ambitious teenager.

He says: "In the last few seasons I have won the UEFA Cup, the German championship several times and the German Cup twice. But I am never satisfied. Once you have won one trophy then you only want to win another. I am a perfectionist and I don't think there is anything wrong in that."

Kahn was virtually unknown when he joined Bayern from Karlsruhe in 1994. Now he is No 1 for his country, holds a Bundesliga record of 737 minutes unbeaten, and has twice gone close to leading his club to a historic treble of European title, German League and German Cup.

In that time, Kahn has become as much of a hero to Bayern fans as was the great Sepp Maier in the 1970s when the club won the European Cup three years in a row.

Maier was feted, rich and famous. But not as rich as Kahn is already – and that modern commercial edge is reflected in his words when he talks about the European Championship.

Germany are not expected to end Euro 2000 as they began it, as holders. But the national team have always had the ability to talk themselves down and then surprise technically superior, complacent opposition. As Kahn says: "Just playing in a big event has never been my ambition. When you play for Bayern Munich, every game is big. In Germany everyone wants to beat us. Each match we play is like a cup final. So what's the point in just playing in another one? I want to win. That is the only reason to be there."

Kahn, outstanding in Bayern's run to the Champions League Final against Manchester United last year, possesses a healthy streak of self-confidence. He made his senior international debut against Switzerland in 1995 but not until after France 98 did he make the position his own. Not that everyone agreed with his promotion. Jens Lehmann, now with Borussia Dortmund, went public with his belief that he, not Kahn, had the experience and talent for the job.

Kahn rose to the challenge. "I think it was quite obvious who was the real No 1," he said. "I was in the best form of my career, my club were top of the table and in the Champions League – nobody else could say that. I'll carry on for another six or seven years, then the rest can fight over it."

Keir Radnedge

Burning ambition...Oliver Kahn

GERMANY

How they line up

ERICH RIBBECK gambled when he undertook to guide Germany's national team to Euro 2000. He had long since decided that the 3-5-2 system as employed by most Bundesliga clubs had outlived its usefulness.

The problem is that the way the Germans used the system has become stereotyped – and the players themselves have stopped thinking creatively. Ribbeck's fears were confirmed when Bayern Munich fell to Real Madrid in the Champions League semi-finals. The movement and technical skills of players such as Raul and Fernando Redondo – even Steve McManaman – presented Bayern with an intellectual challenge rare in the Bundesliga.

However for all Ribbeck's chopping and changing, 3-5-2 remains the tried and trusted tactical formula.

In goal, at least, Ribbeck possesses perhaps the best in the world in **Oliver Kahn**, who has come on so well in the last two years since Andy Kopke handed over the gloves. At one stage Kahn and **Jens Lehmann** were considered as Germany's joint No 1s. No more. Kahn is the rock on which their challenge is built.

In front of Kahn, Ribbeck's choices have been reduced by injuries. Christian Worns' knee problem means that two Bayern old boys will command the centre of defence – **Lothar Matthaus** and **Markus Babbel**, alongside **Thomas Linke**. Matthaus will venture upfield when he can, but at 39, the journey gets harder every time.

Christian Ziege is the wide man on the left – raiding or defending as the state of each game demands – with **Jens Jeremies** and **Dietmar Hamann** playing anchor. **Michael Ballack** will come in if either of these two is injured.

Marko Rehmer is the most likely choice wide on the right of midfield, with the promising but injury-prone and inexperienced **Sebastian Deisler** a possible replacement.

As for the creative options in midfield and attack, almost everything will depend on the last couple of warm-up matches.

Almost…because centre-forward **Oliver Bierhoff** is sure of a place. The Milan spearhead may not be Europe's most skilful players, but his effort and courage are envied by most national coaches heading for Euro 2000.

> 'Libero Matthaus will venture upfield when he can, but at 39, the journey gets harder every time'

But who can give him a consistent service from midfield and who should play off him?

Dariusz Wosz or **Mehmet Scholl** are the most likely candidates to fill the playmaker role behind Bierhoff and a second striker, probably **Marco Bode**. If Scholl gets the nod, he will have the chance to finally make a name for himself at international level. **Thomas Hassler** was given a surprise recall and is a midfield possibility, but is most likely to start on the bench.

Big **Carsten Jancker** is similar in style to Bierhoff but less talented, while **Ulf Kirsten** is probably as surprised as anyone to find himself still in the frame at 34 but, with 17 goals, was second-top scorer in the Bundesliga this season. **Paulo Rink**, another surprise inclusion, is the other option in attack.

Squad

	Club	Age	Caps	Gls
GOALKEEPERS				
Hans-Jorg BUTT	Hamburg	26	0	0
Oliver KAHN	Bayern Munich	31	23	0
Jens LEHMANN	Borussia Dortmund	30	11	0
DEFENDERS				
Markus BABBEL	Bayern Munich	27	47	1
Thomas LINKE	Bayern Munich	30	13	0
Lothar MATTHAUS	MetroStars (USA)	39	146	22
Jens NOWOTNY	Bayer Leverkusen	26	17	0
Marko REHMER	Hertha Berlin	28	9	1
MIDFIELDERS				
Michael BALLACK	Bayer Leverkusen	23	5	0
Sebastian DEISLER	Hertha Berlin	20	1	0
Dietmar HAMANN	Liverpool (Eng)	26	22	2
Thomas HASSLER	1860 Munich	34	97	11
Jens JEREMIES	Bayern Munich	26	22	1
Carsten RAMELOW	Bayer Leverkusen	26	7	0
Mehmet SCHOLL	Bayern Munich	29	24	3
Dariusz WOSZ	Hertha Berlin	31	12	1
Christian ZIEGE	Middlesbrough (Eng)	28	48	8
FORWARDS				
Oliver BIERHOFF	Milan (Ita)	32	47	27
Marco BODE	Werder Bremen	30	18	4
Carsten JANCKER	Bayern Munich	25	5	0
Ulf KIRSTEN	Bayer Leverkusen	34	48	18
Paulo RINK	Bayer Leverkusen	27	6	0

The view from Germany

Hans-Peter Briegel
European Championship winner with West Germany in 1980
"At this moment in time it's hard to be confident about our chances at the European Championship. Our football is only average right now and this should be the situation for three or four years. We just don't have a generation of outstanding footballers."

Klaus Smentek
Columnist with Kicker magazine
"It's totally unworthy to discuss possible successors to Erich Ribbeck when he still has a job to do in the finals. Ribbeck fulfilled his brief by qualifying for the European Championship and deserves more respect."

Bernd Schuster
European Championship winner with West Germany in 1980
"I hope I'm wrong, but we have still to find a competitive team to take to Euro 2000. Under Erich Ribbeck there has been no continuity at all; players and systems are coming and going all the time. There is an atmosphere of complete uncertainty around the national

team and that stems from Ribbeck. He's never shown any consistency, he doesn't seem to have a clear strategy in mind.

"It's obvious an extensive long-term plan needs to be put in place to revive our game and to do so we should make use of competent football men like Franz Beckenbauer, Gunter Netzer, Rudi Voller and Paul Breitner.

"It's too late now but Ribbeck will have to go after the finals, and in his place should come a young and dynamic national coach."

Jupp Derwall
Former West Germany coach
"I don't accept our national team will fail at Euro 2000. If Erich Ribbeck fuses together the best elements from the country's two dominant sides, Bayer Leverkusen and Bayern Munich, the end result could be very positive."

For the record

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

GROUP 3		
10.10.98	Turkey-Germany	1-0
14.10.98	Moldova-Germany	1-3
27.03.99	Northern Ireland-Germany	0-3
31.03.99	Germany-Finland	2-0
04.06.99	Germany-Moldova	6-1
04.09.99	Finland-Germany	1-2
08.09.99	Germany-Northern Ireland	4-0
09.10.99	Germany-Turkey	0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany*	8	6	1	1	20	4	19
Turkey	8	5	2	1	15	6	17
Finland	8	3	1	4	13	13	10
N Ireland	8	1	2	5	4	19	5
Moldova	8	0	4	4	7	17	4

**Germany qualified as group winners*

OTHER RESULTS SINCE SUMMER 1999

24.07.99	Germany-Brazil (Confed. Cup)	0-4
28.07.99	Germany-New Zealand (Confed. Cup)	2-0
30.07.99	Germany-USA (Confed. Cup)	0-2
14.11.99	Norway-Germany (friendly)	0-1
23.02.00	Holland-Germany (friendly)	2-1
29.03.00	Croatia-Germany (friendly)	1-1
26.04.00	Germany-Switzerland (friendly)	1-1

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS RECORD

(1960-1988 as West Germany)

1960	Did not enter
1964	Did not enter
1968	Did not qualify
1972	Winners
1976	Finalists
1980	Winners
1984	Group stage
1988	Semi-finalists
1992	Finalists
1996	Winners

QUESTIONS TO THE COACH
Erich Ribbeck

Who are your favourites to win Euro 2000, and why?
Holland has an excellent team and the advantage of playing at home. I would add Belgium as host nation and the strong teams of Spain, France and Italy.

Who will be the star players?
Raul, Davids, Zidane.

Who will be the surprises, and why? Who will be the most surprising youngsters?
Turkey, because they are technically very strong and if they can be effective, then they are dangerous. I hope one of our youngsters will cause a surprise.

How do you rate the chances of your team? What stage can they reach?
We think from match to match – everything is possible.

How is your team preparation? Do you have enough time?
I did not have enough time, at least one more week would have been necessary. Generally, national teams need more time.

What would you suggest to the referees?
I would suggest a uniform interpretation of the rules.

Which will be the tactical habits at Euro 2000?
I wish we would see more offensive matches, but I fear we will get more defensive games. It is incredibly difficult to equalise or even turn a goal deficit.

How do you see each group at Euro 2000?
They are all very equal, but ours is the toughest and totally open.

Do you think the joint organisation of Holland and Belgium will have more advantages or more disadvantages, and in which areas?
We have to wait and see, it is a new experience. Principally, you have to solve every organisational problem twice.

Do you think hooliganism will create problems?
Hopefully not. Everyone should take drastic measures: police at first, but justice and policy-makers as well.

Selecting Thomas Hassler was a surprise.
There's no risk in naming him. His 97 caps bring with them enormous experience. He is a man you can count on when you are in trouble.

Teutonic teamwork...everything is possible for Germany

AT WWW.WORLDSOCCER.COM

Time to deliver

The Portuguese can make a major impact – if they overcome their major weakness, says John Holmesdale

Wing wonder...Luis Figo takes on Italy's Alessandro Nesta

"YOU know one of the best things about my national team?" asks Portuguese playmaker Rui Costa (interviewed opposite).

"That it sticks in your mind – it's memorable and enjoyable. For us, to get together and play is pure joy, and it encourages us to do even better.

"Too often it's said that we are great club players. Now it's time to change that perception."

Euro 2000 offers a last chance for a talented generation of Portuguese players to win a major prize. The great fear for Humberto Coelho's side is that they will become victims of their own success at club level, and will arrive at Euro 2000 too tired to mount a credible challenge.

The Portuguese have one more friendly arranged – against Wales on June 2 – before leaving for Holland. "I suppose you could say that we are slightly worried about turning up for Euro 2000 feeling tired," Rui Costa comments.

"Paulo Sousa has a slight injury, nothing serious, and Luis Figo may be feeling a little worn out, but I can't imagine a Portugal side without those two both giving it their all."

Coelho was forced to delay naming his final 22-man squad until after the Portuguese Cup Final, which went to a replay when Sporting Lisbon and FC Porto drew 1-1.

Coelho named an initial 15-man party and was expected to top it up with seven players from the two finalists. There were few surprises in his initial pool, with all the big names based abroad – Figo, Rui Costa, Paulo Sousa, Fernando Couto – making the cut.

Monaco midfielder Francisco da Costa was rewarded for his form with the French League champions. He is a hard-working ball-winner who could play a role in fetching and carrying for the likes of Rui Costa and Figo.

But there was no place for two young starlets, Barcelona's Simao Sabrosa and Dani of Ajax.

There is no doubting Portugal's abundance of attacking talent in midfield. But four years on from Euro 96, the Portuguese are nowhere nearer answering the fundamental question: who will score the goals?

In England, Antonio Oliveira's side lit up an essentially dour tournament with some magical football. But, ultimately, they were let down by a toothless attack.

Rui Costa is quick to acknowledge his team's major weakness. "We lack a true centre-forward. In Italy, I notice so many excellent attacking players who cannot get into their national side. But, we, through nobody's fault, haven't even got one. It's a great shame. How many goals would a striker like Vieri score if he had players like Sergio Conceicao and Figo on the wings?"

Much of the goalscoring burden will again fall on the shoulders of Joao Pinto and Sa Pinto,

'Portugal are nowhere near answering the fundamental question: who will score the goals?'

neither of whom comes anywhere near Vieri's record in front of goal.

Then there are those in Portugal who argue that Coelho should do everything in his power to ensure that Pauleta's success in winning the Spanish League with Deportivo be transferred to the international stage.

The danger, of course, is that Portugal will again delight and frustrate in equal measure, winning many friends but losing where it really counts, on the pitch.

Attacking threat...Joao Pinto (left)

★ Star Man
Rui Costa

FOR more than a decade Manuel Rui Costa has been the leading light in a Portuguese team that has threatened to upset the established footballing order.

It was Rui Costa whose penalty kick retained the World Youth Cup on home soil in Lisbon in 1991 after a goalless draw in the Final with Brazil. The Portugal team that day also included such talents as Luis Figo and Joao Pinto.

Since then, Portuguese players have established themselves at some of Europe's leading clubs: Figo at Barcelona, Fernando Couto at Parma, Barcelona and Lazio, and Paulo Sousa at Juventus, Dortmund, Inter and Parma. Rui Costa, meanwhile, has stayed at Fiorentina.

For many who have watched him teasing and tricking his way past Serie A defenders and prompting his forwards with tempting passes, it has been a mystery why Portugal's playmaker has stayed so long at such an underachieving club.

Rui Costa is guarded about his future, but it is clear that he could soon be moving on. "After six years, who wouldn't be looking for a change? That's all I'll say on the matter."

Portugal's lack of cutting edge in attack means that much will again depend on Rui Costa's goals from midfield (he scored six times in the qualifiers). But the priority will still be to play entertaining soccer. It is what the folks back home have come to expect.

"Our game flows really well. It is fluent, smooth, penetrating. We're really good to watch now, and I think we're aware of this."

Rui Costa is also aware that the team Portugal face in their opening match, England, could be the toughest test of the group.

"We're going to have a hard landing at Euro 2000, but perhaps it's better this way," he says. "At the moment it's England who are bothering us. A lot of the team are Manchester United players and so they know each other's game by heart, and they have that almost perfect blend of physical strength, which is so typically English, and Latin skills."

If Portugal do progress, it will be down in no small part to the contribution of the Fiorentina man. A tournament which threatens to be overrun by workmanlike Scandinavians and well-organised Eastern Europeans deserves to see an extended run from Rui Costa and Co.

"We can make it to the quarter-finals," he insists. "Then, well, we'll see. We are behind the true greats, but only because we haven't won a major championship. For now, at least."

Dominique Antognoni

Entertainer-in-chief...Rui Costa

PORTUGAL

How they line up

PORTUGAL'S main injury worry concerns first-choice keeper **Vitor Baia**, who recently underwent knee surgery and faces a race against time to be fit for the finals. If he does not make it, either **Pedro Espinha** of Guimaraes or Braga's **Quim** should step in, with Espinha slightly the favourite.

During his playing days, national coach Humberto Coelho was a cultured, adventurous central defender, who modelled his game on Franz Beckenbauer.

But as Portugal boss he has shaped his back four around a pair of no-frills, no-nonsense central defenders – **Fernando Couto** and **Jorge Costa**. Promising young Sporting Lisbon stopper **Beto** will have to wait his turn.

At full-back, Everton's **Abel Xavier** has moved ahead of **Secretario** in the pecking order for the right-back slot, while the in-form **Dimas** – who has been in fine fettle for Standard Liege – ought to be preferred to **Paulinho Santos** at left-back. **Rui Jorge** and **Paulo Madeira** are probable defensive auxiliaries.

Portugal are a team of flexibility and fluidity, perfectly able to switch between a 4-5-1, 4-4-2 or 4-3-3 formation according to the opposition.

If Coelho plumps for a five-man midfield, it will feature two deeper players on the flanks – **Sergio Conceicao** and **Paulo Bento** are the most likely to start, but **Paulo Sousa**, **Paulinho Santos**, **Nuno Capucho** and **Vidigal** are more than valid alternatives – plus a trio of more attack-minded midfielders.

Rui Costa will be cast as the team's *eminence grise*, with **Luis Figo** on the right and **Joao Pinto** buzzing mainly on the left.

Sergio Conceicao, as his performances for Lazio have proved, is also versatile enough to operate in a more advanced position on the right flank, giving Figo licence to roam.

A four-man Portuguese midfield usually boasts two holding players, plus Rui Costa and Figo, while an engine-room threesome consists of the all-important Rui Costa flanked by a duo of enforcers.

As a TV pundit at Euro 96, Coelho bemoaned the absence in his country's team of a 'Klinsmann type', a powerful, proven goalscorer who can hold the ball up. Unfortunately, a Portuguese prototype has yet to arrive on the scene and whether employing three, two or just one up front, the coach is still no nearer finding the ideal formula for his attack.

'As a player, Coelho modelled his game on Beckenbauer, but as a coach he has shaped a no-frills defence'

Forwards such as Joao Pinto, **Sa Pinto**, **Pauleta** and **Nuno Gomes** are all from the same mould – highly technical, well-balanced and mobile. But the flip side is that they lack physical presence and are not sharp finishers.

It may well be that Figo turns out to be Portugal's most hard-hitting attacking weapon. His goal return – 13 in 59 internationals – compares favourably with an out-and-out striker like Joao Pinto – 18 from 56 – and in a 4-3-3 system, he can wreak havoc as an orthodox right-winger. He is even more dangerous when floating along the front line.

Squad pool

	Club	Age	Caps	Gls
GOALKEEPERS				
PEDRO ESPINHA	Guimaraes	34	3	0
QUIM	Sporting Braga	24	2	0
VITOR BAIA	FC Porto	30	69	0
DEFENDERS				
ABEL XAVIER	Everton (Eng)	27	13	2
BETO	Sporting Lisbon	24	5	0
DIMAS	Standard Liege (Blg)	31	33	0
FERNANDO COUTO	Lazio (Ita)	30	61	6
JORGE COSTA	FC Porto	28	25	0
LITOS	Boavista	26	2	0
PAULINHO SANTOS	FC Porto	29	30	2
PAULO MADEIRA	Benfica	29	24	3
RUI JORGE	Sporting Lisbon	27	3	0
SECRETARIO	FC Porto	30	27	1
MIDFIELDERS				
CALADO	Benfica	24	4	0
Nuno CAPUCHO	FC Porto	28	12	1
Francisco da COSTA	Monaco (Fra)	25	2	0
DELFIM	Sporting Lisbon	23	0	0
Luis FIGO	Barcelona (Spa)	27	59	13
PAULINHO SANTOS	FC Porto	29	30	2
PAULO BENTO	Oviedo (Spa)	30	20	0
PAULO SOUSA	Parma (Ita)	29	43	0
PEDRO BARBOSA	Sporting Lisbon	29	14	3
PEIXE	FC Porto	27	12	0
RUI COSTA	Fiorentina (Ita)	28	50	18
SERGIO CONCEICAO	Lazio (Ita)	25	22	2
VIDIGAL	Sporting Lisbon	27	1	0
FORWARDS				
DANI	Ajax (Hol)	23	8	0
DOMINGOS	FC Porto	31	34	9
JOAO PINTO	Benfica	28	56	18
MANICHE	Benfica	22	0	0
NUNO GOMES	Benfica	23	10	0
PAULETA	La Coruna (Spa)	27	12	3
SA PINTO	Real Sociedad (Spa)	27	35	7
SIMAO Sabrosa	Barcelona (Spa)	20	1	1

The view from Portugal

Eduardo Helder

Germany correspondent for the Portuguese sports daily Record

"I know Germany are fearful of the quality of the Portuguese midfield and they have a right to be. They would love to have players of the class of Rui Costa, Figo and Sergio Conceicao, and one could argue that the Portuguese midfield unit is the best in Europe.

"Defensively, I think Portugal are better than they are given credit for; the central defensive duo of Fernando Couto and Jorge Costa are great competitors and very experienced.

"Of course, the big question mark for us is in attack. If we are to make progress in the championship, we have to show more killer instinct near goal."

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Jaime Graca
Former Portugal and Benfica midfielder
"The national team play wonderful football, the passing and movement is a joy to watch. But sometimes we lack physical force and our attacks are built up too slowly. We are footballing poets but we are inclined to forget that this game is all about scoring goals."

Fernando Chalana
European Championship semi-finalist with Portugal in 1984
"I'm excited about our prospects. I can see us going a long way in the tournament. It's true the team has often lacked realism in attack. But I feel this can be overcome if Figo and Rui Costa are on top of their game, because they can inspire the whole team. Vitor Baia is a worry. If he's not fit, he'll be very badly missed."

For the record

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

GROUP 7		
06.09.98	Hungary-Portugal	1-3
10.10.98	Portugal-Romania	0-1
14.10.98	Slovakia-Portugal	0-3
26.03.99	Portugal-Azerbaijan	7-0
31.03.99	Liechtenstein-Portugal	0-5
05.06.99	Portugal-Slovakia	1-0
09.06.99	Portugal-Liechtenstein	8-0
04.09.99	Azerbaijan-Portugal	1-1
08.09.99	Romania-Portugal	1-1
09.10.99	Portugal-Hungary	3-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Romania	10	7	3	0	25	3	24
Portugal*	10	7	2	1	32	4	23
Slovakia	10	5	2	3	12	9	17
Hungary	10	3	3	4	14	10	12
Azerbaijan	10	1	1	8	6	26	4
Liechtenstein	10	1	1	8	2	39	4

**Portugal qualified as best runners-up*

OTHER RESULTS SINCE SUMMER 1999

18.08.99	Portugal-Andorra (friendly)	4-0
23.02.00	Belgium-Portugal (friendly)	1-1
29.03.00	Portugal-Denmark (friendly)	2-1
26.04.00	Italy-Portugal (friendly)	2-0

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS RECORD

1960	Quarter-finalists
1964	1st round (no qualifying stage)
1968	Did not qualify
1972	Did not qualify
1976	Did not qualify
1980	Did not qualify
1984	Semi-finalists
1988	Did not qualify
1992	Did not qualify
1996	Quarter-finalists

QUESTIONS TO THE COACH
Humberto Coelho

How do you feel going into this tournament?
We have a distinct advantage in the sense that our teamwork is second to none.

Many of the squad have been playing together for Portuguese representative teams since they were teenagers. The importance of this factor cannot be overstated.

Who will be your key players at Euro 2000?
Big tournaments are a stage for big players and I expect the likes of Figo and Rui Costa to rise to the occasion.

They are at the peak of their careers and definitely have the ability to emerge as stars of the tournament.

Perhaps for some of them, this will be the last opportunity they will have to win a European Championship. But it's not only a question of Figo and Rui Costa performing well. Every other player has to step forward as well.

Now is the time for us to deliver. There can be no more excuses.

Your team has a reputation for attractive football and there's no doubt that a lot of people would like to see you do well in the tournament.
I like to hear coaches of other nations say how highly they rate Portugal. This can only help boost our morale.

It is true that, in the past, Portuguese sides have felt inferior to major nations such as Germany and Italy. But I don't think this is the case any more.

Portugal is a well-respected footballing country in its own right, with a number of top-quality players. We know our worth and are no longer on the back foot before we start.

What is your target for the tournament?
Portugal haven't qualified for the European Championship too many times, so we must grasp our opportunity.

I'd like us to follow the example of the side that went to the 1984 Championship. They weren't among the favourites, but really applied themselves and reached the semi-finals.

I want us to show the same spirit and will to make things happen. We are going to the tournament with the aim of winning. I have complete confidence in our players.

A victory in the opener [against England] would be a great morale-booster.

Crowd pleasers...Portugal will have the purists purring

AT WWW.WORLDSOCCER.COM

An old fox with a quality team

Bob Vaughan looks at the prospects for Emerich Jenei's squad

ROMANIA's football has come on so much in the past decade that qualifying for major tournaments and going some way in the finals is now the minimum expectation.

National coach Emerich Jenei is, no doubt, all too aware of the dangers inherent in this attitude, and it would not be surprising if, in response, he approached Euro 2000 with even more caution than he usually displays.

The inclusion of veteran defender Miodrag Belodedici in Jenei's preliminary squad for the Low Countries is perhaps the surest indication that he feels experience will be absolutely invaluable to the cause during the tournament.

Jenei has not had an easy ride since taking over a national side that qualified convincingly under his predecessor, Victor Piturca, now in charge of the stuttering Steaua side that Jenei coached before he took the Romania job.

Firstly, there were difficulties arranging a warm-up friendly programme, with Ukraine pulling out of a fixture claiming they had already agreed to play Bulgaria on the same day. Then when Romania did play, away to Greece at the end of March, the 2-0 defeat brought calls for Piturca to be reinstated. To Jenei's astonishment, there was an enormous turn-out at the airport on the team's return from Athens and his efforts to point to the positive aspects of the performance failed miserably.

Although the domestic League programme finished early, most of the first-choice players were based abroad, where they continued to play well into May. As a consequence, it was tired squad members who came trickling into Bucharest ahead of the pre-tournament camp.

'Jenei has not had an easy ride since taking over a side that qualified convincingly under his predecessor'

All is not gloom, however. As a coach, Jenei is something of a cunning old fox, and the squad, which in essence was created by Piturca's predecessor, Anghel Iordanescu, has undoubted quality.

Fitness battle...Adrian Ilie

High jinks...Romania defend in numbers against a Portuguese free-kick

There is plenty of experience down the spine of the team, with Bogdan Stelea in goal, Gica Popescu and Belodedici at the heart of the defence, and the evergreen Gheorghe Hagi playing off the strikers. Hagi has stated that this really will be his last tournament and he will want to go out in style, unlike his red-card exit from the UEFA Cup Final, even though his club, Galatasaray, won.

Jenei will hope to have his main strike threat, Adrian Ilie, fit for the finals after injury forced him to miss Valencia's run to the Champions League Final. There is no doubt that if the whole team function well, Hagi, in bursts, and Ilie could be the men to disappoint the Germans and get past England again, as at France 98.

Whatever the result of the first game, against Germany in Liege on June 12, Romania will be the favourites in Arnhem five days later against Portugal, from whom they took four points in the qualifiers. Then comes the clash with England in Charleroi. This will probably be a tactical battle, an area in which Jenei is a master.

First, however, he must ensure that the defence is sound and not too slow, and that Stelea is no longer prone to mix brilliance with nonsense.

★ Star Man
Gheorghe Hagi

SEVENTEEN years after his international debut, a goalless draw with Norway in 1983, Gheorghe Hagi remains as crucial to Romania's cause as ever.

Hagi is his country's most celebrated footballer of all time. His first club, Farul, based in the Black Sea port of Constanta, re-named their stadium after their famous son, and last December he was named as Romania's player of the century.

After Hagi's return from international retirement last year, a group of fans gave him a racehorse to thank him; another group named a cake in his honour.

Yet for all the adulation heaped upon him by his countrymen, Hagi, now 35, has never quite justified the hype. The 'Maradona of the Carpathians' tag has weighed heavily on him during his travels in Europe, from Real Madrid to Barcelona via Brescia, and now Galatasaray.

The 1994 World Cup, when a Hagi-inspired Romania reached the quarter-finals, may prove to have been his finest hour.

Last month's UEFA Cup Final presented Hagi with an opportunity to finally win some silverware on a continental stage. His joy at finally winning a European medal was mixed with frustration at being sent off after foolishly hitting out at Arsenal's Tony Adams.

The UEFA Cup triumph completed the treble for Galatasaray, where Hagi has now won the League title four years in a row.

The legs rarely last more than an hour these days. But while they do, Hagi remains the fulcrum of the Romanian side, floating behind the forwards and conducting proceedings with the air of a grand master. And the left foot continues to pack a mean punch.

Hagi is still considering a lucrative offer to stay on in Istanbul for another season. He is not short of other suitors. Major League Soccer could be his ultimate destination, or a role in the national team coaching set-up.

In the meantime, Euro 2000 awaits.

Hagi has tried to retire from the national team before, notably after the 1998 World Cup. He returned for one match only, in June last year, and helped Romania beat Hungary for the first time in 63 years.

Public pressure forced him to continue – "My body and my heart tell me that I have to go on" – but he now insists that he will finally quit after Romania's friendly against Yugoslavia in Bucharest on August 22. Then again…

John Holmesdale

Adored in Romania...Gheorghe Hagi

ROMANIA

How they line up

COACH Emerich Jenei is an experienced campaigner and clever tactician who has packed his squad with a mix of youthful talent and experienced tournament operators.

Jenei's main challenge has been to keep as many experienced players in the squad as possible, while also beginning the process of blooding young talent.

"We're playing a modern game," says Jenei, "that is good to watch, with lots of possession and plenty of changes in tempo. We play a 4-4-2 formation, with lots of movement."

In goal, **Bogdan Stelea** is re-established as the number one choice, but probably for the last time at a major tournament. He faces competition from the young and highly promising **Bogdan Lobont**. **Florin Prunea**, despite his experience, is likely to be the third-choice keeper.

In defence, Jenei has surprisingly recalled the veteran **Miodrag Belodedici**. He last played for Romania against Bulgaria during Euro 96 and his inclusion in the preliminary squad was a major surprise. However, he is unlikely to dislodge the first-choice sweeper, **Gheorghe Popescu**, who is a crucial figure at the back for the Romanians.

Liviu Ciobotariu partners Popescu in central defence, with **Iulian Filipescu** at left-back in a back four, moving to centre-back in a back three. **Cosmin Contra** is the most likely starter at right-back, while **Stefan Nanu** can provide cover at left-back. **Iulian Miu** and **Cristian Chivu** provide general defensive cover.

In midfield, **Dan Petrescu** is well established on the right flank, with **Laurentiu Rosu** or **Dorinel Munteanu** on the left and **Constantin Galca** playing an important holding role in the centre. This allows **Gheorghe Hagi** the chance to conduct proceedings.

Hagi rarely lasts more than 60 minutes these days, but his influence on the side remains huge. Jenei's major tactical decisions are therefore likely to centre around what to do when Hagi tires in the second half. One option is to move Dorinel Munteanu into the centre, and bring in **Catalin Munteanu** (no relation) on the left. A more defensive option would be to bring in veteran Ioan Lupescu to patrol just in front of the defence.

A more positive substitution would be to introduce the more attack-minded **Catalin Haldan** or **Florentin Petre**. **Erik Lincar** and **Marius Maldarasanu** can provide central midfield cover, but are not expected to play a major role.

> 'We're playing a modern game with lots of possession and plenty of changes in tempo' – Emerich Jenei

In attack, **Adrian Ilie** is likely to start, even though his form and appearances for Valencia have been patchy this season. **Viorel Moldovan** is his most likely partner.

The trump card could be the youngster **Adrian Mutu**, who is considered a prodigious talent in Romania and could be one of the surprise players of the tournament – similar to Michael Owen at France 98 – if given the chance.

Ioan Ganea has not set the world alight at Stuttgart this season, but he has been preferred by Jenei to the promising teenager Marius Niculae because of his impressive goalscoring record at international level.

Squad pool

	Club	Age	Caps	Gls
GOALKEEPERS				
Bogdan LOBONT	Ajax Amsterdam (Hol)	22	8	0
Florin PRUNEA	Universitatea Craiova	31	37	0
Bogdan STELEA	Salamanca (Spa)	32	65	0
DEFENDERS				
Miodrag BELODEDICI	Steaua Bucharest	35	49	5
Cristian CHIVU	Ajax Amsterdam (Hol)	19	2	0
Liviu CIOBOTARIU	Standard Liege (Blg)	29	20	0
Cosmin CONTRA	Alaves (Spa)	24	11	0
Iulian FILIPESCU	Betis Sevilla (Spa)	26	32	0
Iulian MIU	Steaua Bucharest	24	0	0
Stefan NANU	Vitesse Arnhem (Hol)	31	7	0
Dan PETRESCU	Chelsea (Eng)	32	87	12
Gheorghe POPESCU	Galatasaray (Tur)	32	96	15
MIDFIELDERS				
Constantin GALCA	Espanyol (Spa)	28	53	4
Gheorghe HAGI	Galatasaray (Tur)	35	121	34
Catalin HALDAN	Dinamo Bucharest	24	5	0
Erik LINCAR	Steaua Bucharest	21	2	0
Ioan LUPESCU	Dinamo Bucharest	31	69	6
Marius MALDARASANU	Rapid Bucharest	25	4	0
Catalin MUNTEANU	Salamanca (Spa)	20	8	1
Dorinel MUNTEANU	Wolfsburg (Ger)	31	84	10
Florentin PETRE	Dinamo Bucharest	24	15	1
Laurentiu ROSU	Steaua Bucharest	24	13	3
FORWARDS				
Ioan GANEA	Stuttgart (Ger)	26	11	8
Adrian ILIE	Valencia (Spa)	26	33	11
Viorel MOLDOVAN	Fenerbahce (Tur)	27	46	19
Adrian MUTU	Internazionale (Ita)	20	2	1

The view from Romania

Laszlo Boloni

Former Romanian international midfielder

"My tip is for Romania and England to go through to the quarter-finals. Portugal don't score enough goals and as for the Germans, they don't frighten anyone any more. The key for Romania is that Ilie is fit and on form. I also expect Galca in midfield to have an impressive tournament."

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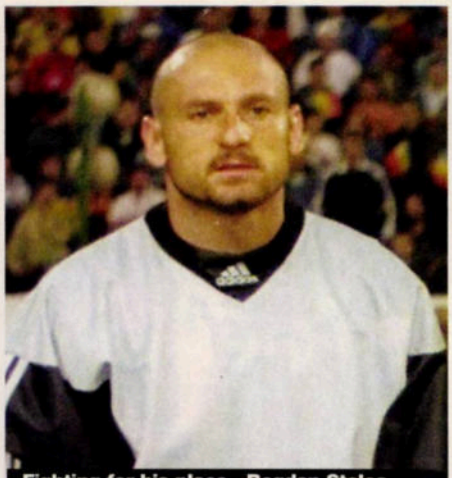

Fighting for his place...Bogdan Stelea

For the record

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

GROUP 7		
02.09.98	Romania-Liechtenstein	7-0
10.10.98	Portugal-Romania	0-1
14.10.98	Hungary-Romania	1-1
27.03.99	Romania-Slovakia	0-0
31.03.99	Azerbaijan-Romania	0-1
05.06.99	Romania-Hungary	2-0
09.06.99	Romania-Azerbaijan	4-0
04.09.99	Slovakia-Romania	1-5
08.09.99	Romania-Portugal	1-1
09.10.99	Liechtenstein-Romania	0-3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Romania*	10	7	3	0	25	3	24
Portugal	10	7	2	1	32	4	23
Slovakia	10	5	2	3	12	9	17
Hungary	10	3	3	4	14	10	12
Azerbaijan	10	1	1	8	6	26	4
Liechtenstein	10	1	1	8	2	39	4

**Romania qualified as group winners*

OTHER RESULTS SINCE SUMMER 1999

18.08.99	Cyprus-Romania (friendly)	2-2
19.01.00	Mexico-Romania (friendly)	3-1
02.02.00	Romania-Latvia (Cyprus tnmt)	2-0
04.02.00	Romania-Georgia (Cyprus tnmt) (*aet; Romania 4-2 on pens*)	1-1
06.02.00	Cyprus-Romania (Cyprus tnmt Final) (*aet*)	3-2
29.03.00	Greece-Romania (friendly)	2-0
26.04.00	Romania-Cyprus (friendly)	2-0

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS RECORD

1960	Quarter-finalists
1964	1st round (no qualifying stage)
1968	Did not qualify
1972	Quarter-finalists
1976	Did not qualify
1980	Did not qualify
1984	Group stage
1988	Did not qualify
1992	Did not qualify
1996	Group stage

QUESTIONS TO THE COACH
Emerich Jenei

Who are you tipping to win Euro 2000?
Perhaps more than ever before, most of the competing teams are playing at around the same level. Many of the so-called great teams have lost something, while the others have gained in experience, confidence, and technical and tactical skill. If I really have to name a team, then I'd go for France or Holland. But it's worth bearing in mind that Denmark won in 1992, which shows that anything can happen.

Who will be the outstanding players of the tournament?
All the superstars are going to turn up tired, very tired. I'm inclined to say that the team with the best gameplan are going to win. So, I'm not thinking in terms of outstanding players.

What must the winning team have that the others won't have?
The winning team will be the one that can best overcome the physical exhaustion of its players.

Clever talent...Adrian Mutu

What's the state of your side? Do you have any worries about them?
I'm concerned about them turning up relatively late to the camp. Galca is playing in the Spanish Cup, Mutu the Italian Cup, Hagi and Gica Popescu are in the UEFA Cup. I had planned on us getting together from May 18 to 25, but I think it will have to be delayed until after the friendly against Holland at Eindhoven on May 27. I think we'll finally all get together between then and June 3.

Which are you thinking about most – doing well at Euro 2000 or qualifying for the World Cup in 2002?
Ideally I'd like to develop a team during Euro 2000 that can qualify for the World Cup – to use the European Championship as a pathway to the World Cup. I'll be deploying four or five young players in Holland and Belgium, with the hope that it will start to prepare them for 2002. With Contra, for example, I think quite simply that he now has a rightful place at the highest international level.

At Italia 90, you did something nobody else has done: after qualifying for the quarter-finals, you went home for two days, leaving the players alone. Is it likely to happen again?
Having played football for so many years, I know what a player's problems are. We only had a month to get our game together, and I thought it might be better to get away for a couple of days, so they could act and behave however they wanted. I knew it would be OK because they are dedicated, highly professional lads. In any case, I'm not the only person who's done it – remember at Euro 96, Smicer left to go and get married.

And yes, I suppose it could happen again if we get through the group stage.

What do you make of your group?
I think we have a psychological advantage over England and Portugal. We beat England in the World Cup two years ago, so they're afraid of us; and we beat Portugal away in the qualifiers, 1-0, even though it finished 1-1 in the return in Bucharest. That just leaves Germany, but they're not as scary as they once were.

Who are your key players?
It's so easy to talk of Hagi, but the other older players are no less great – Dan Petrescu, Gica Popescu, Stelea, Ilie. And then there's Adrian Mutu – I admire him a great deal, he's a very clever player.

And what about Hagi?
Yes, I know, after Euro 2000 he's retiring. That's such a shame, he's a fantastic man, an icon, a role model, a trailblazer, an immense talent. Listen up, this is going to be his tournament. He wants to go out on a high at the end of a tumultuous career.

How do you view your national team?
Many of the players are reaching the final years of their career and they want to be seen to be playing well. That's a very positive thing. They believe Romania could well get to the Final.

Are there going to be any surprises?
Yes, us.

PROFILES AT WWW.WORLDSOCCER.COM

New coach, new class

Robert Waseige deserves a lot of credit for his team's rise, says Nicholas Harling

THE appointment of a new coach and the discovery of a new marksman from midfield seem to have worked wonders for Belgium's confidence going into Euro 2000.

The Red Devils went into their last warm-up friendly, against Denmark on June 3, having suffered only one defeat – by England – since Robert Waseige succeeded Georges Leekens last autumn.

Some of the credit for that much-improved record should go to Gert Verheyen, the 29-year-old right-winger who has suddenly discovered a goalscorer's touch.

Verheyen's first 24 games for his country yielded only two goals but, responding to orders to get forward more, he came up with three in his last two internationals to become an invaluable member of the side. He was on target in the 2-2 draw with Holland, then scored both goals in a 2-0 victory in Norway.

Goalscoring revelation...Gert Verheyen

Verheyen is a robust player whose strength in the tackle and determination compensate for his possible lack of technique. He has established himself at Club Brugge after making little impression when with Anderlecht, and must have been one of the first names on Waseige's list when he announced his preliminary Euro 2000 selection of 24 players.

Waseige was appointed only because he seemed to be the one person with a decent pedigree who was instantly available. Nevertheless, he appears to have quickly commanded the respect of a sceptical squad who were heading only for the near certainty of Euro humiliation under the genial but possibly extremely misguided Leekens.

No newcomer can have been welcomed with quite such a spectacular start as Waseige, who was astonished to witness a 5-5 draw with Holland in Rotterdam in his first game in charge.

It was all the more remarkable because the previous fixture between the nations, at France 98, had been a spiteful, almost chanceless, goalless

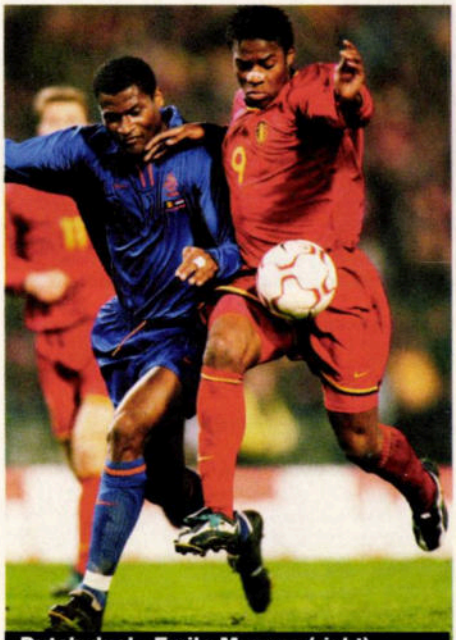
'Waseige has commanded the respect of a sceptical squad who were heading only for Euro humiliation'

draw. Memories of that hostile Group E encounter in Paris faded in the context of the countries' high-scoring tussle. "It was a great game for the crowd and spectators at home," said Waseige. "I had told my players to attack but not all the time. Holland could have scored 10. As a coach you cannot be satisfied when the opposition score five and defensively we really made a mess of it on a couple of occasions."

He has tightened things up since, of course, with the defence ably marshalled as ever around the formidable Lorenzo Staelens.

"I wasn't particularly nervous because it was only a friendly and there were no points at stake," added Waseige. "Euro 2000 will be completely different, of course. When Holland came back from 2-0 down to lead 3-2 I thought my players looked a bunch of losers. They lacked aggression. But at half-time I had a word with them. They immediately understood my feelings."

And so they did. The players received Waseige's message loud and clear in the dressing-room that


Dutch duel...Emile Mpenza (right)

night and have hardly looked back since. Encouraging results have been achieved against four Euro 2000 rivals: draws against Portugal and Holland (again), and wins away to Norway and Italy.

With form returning, the main handicap facing Waseige's players now is the venue for all their group games. The revamped Heysel in Brussels, now known as the King Baudouin stadium, is no hotbed of passion, and we will soon learn whether some sort of decent atmosphere is generated for Belgium's meetings there with Sweden, Italy and Turkey.

Immigrant workers from Italy and Turkey will certainly raise the decibel levels at the ground, but Waseige would just love it if the Flemish followers could shed their inhibitions and roar their own team on.

A year ago Belgium almost seemed to be dreading the tournament. They wanted it over and done with swiftly. "To hell with the embarrassment of a meek surrender" was the feeling of the co-hosts. If that's how it's going to be, let it happen so we can deal with it and forget it. That was the general consensus. Now, however, there is a guarded measure of optimism.

Even so there is a sense that the event has come a year too early for Waseige, who has restored esteem and morale to a level not experienced for a decade. Who knows to what extent Belgium might have blended and how well they may have fared had the event come 12 months later?

★ Star Man
Luc Nilis

BELGIUM know they would be cutting off their nose to spite their face by punishing Luc Nilis for refusing to play under former coach Georges Leekens. If Nilis was to continue his international exile, it could well be to the national team's cost at Euro 2000.

Now, happily restored to the side by Leekens' successor, Robert Waseige, Nilis is threatening to help the Red Devils live up to their name at the time they need him most.

Of all the senior players who fell out with Leekens, Nilis was possibly the most vehement in his objections to the coach's methods. When Waseige took over from Leekens last autumn Nilis was almost immediately saying that he was available for selection again. The topic became one for national debate. On one side there was a consensus that the player should be forced to remain on the sidelines; but Waseige was obviously among the huge majority who wanted him back in the squad.

So Nilis returned to give Belgium one further option in the department where they are strongest. The rapport that the PSV man established with Gilles De Bilde at club level before De Bilde left for Sheffield Wednesday would hopefully not take long to be restored. Failing that, Nilis could always line up against Group B opponents Sweden, Turkey and Italy with Branko Strupar, Toni Brogno or one of the Mpenza brothers.

Best remembered for the two goals in the play-offs for France 98 that helped put his country into the finals, Nilis has nevertheless largely failed to transport his club goalscoring exploits to the international arena. Anderlecht and PSV, for the past six years, have benefited from his opportunism, but he has not shown his scoring prowess for Belgium. His 52 caps have yielded only 10 goals, which is nine fewer, for instance, than he managed for PSV this season when he was down on his usual average for the Dutch champions.

But Nilis is not just a goalscorer. Some say that his free-kicks are as good as, if not better than, David Beckham's, and club-mate Ruud Van Nistelrooy would testify to the enormous help he has had from Nilis this season. Invariably the Belgian was the provider of the final pass as Van Nistelrooy accumulated his 29 goals before injury so sadly cut him down.

At 33, some would say that Nilis is past his sell-by date, but John Gregory, who has persuaded him to join Aston Villa next season, is obviously one coach who does not subscribe to that view.

Nicholas Harling

Back in favour...Luc Nilis

BELGIUM

How they line up

A STICKLER for 4-4-2, Robert Waseige. Or, failing that, variations on the theme depending on injuries, availability and the strength of the opposition. But rare indeed are those occasions when Belgium's coach prepares his side for an international without four men at the back and two at the front.

Only in midfield is there sometimes not a constant quartet. One man may play just in front of the back four in the holding role or, another option, just behind the front two.

Either way, it would be pedantic not to call the system 4-4-2. Waseige swears by it and has done so for most of his 29-year chequered career as a coach, with Third Division KFC Winterslag, Standard Liege, Lokeren, Liege and Sporting Lisbon.

It is a shame, seeing that Belgium are co-hosts, that one of their favourite sons, Enzo Scifo, will not be adorning the Euro 2000 stage. But Scifo is 34 and has heavy commitments at Charleroi. He also owns a restaurant nearby at La Louviere so he could have no complaints when Waseige overlooked him. Nor is Luis Oliveira, so recently a key member of the Belgian attack, going to figure in the tournament. The combination of relegation with Cagliari and age – as in the case of Scifo – have taken their toll on the Brazil-born striker.

Waseige has options in every area of the field. Belgium, it can be certain, will not be one of the strongest entrants or blessed with any over-abundance of exceptional talent at their disposal, but neither should they be found wanting if Waseige feels any need to replace his original selection. Take the goalkeepers, for instance. In **Geert De Vlieger**, **Ronny Gaspercic** and **Filip De Wilde**, Belgium have three experienced men who are much of a muchness, safe without being spectacular.

The new coach was not expected to sanction any late surprises but appears to have made an exception in **Joos Valgaeren**, Roda JC's tall 24-year-old defender, who made a promising debut in the 1-1 draw with Portugal in February alongside **Lorenzo Staelens**. Valgaeren appears to have made quite a case for his selection, all the more so because he can also operate in midfield. However, he does face stiff opposition for the other centre-back role from **Jacky Peeters.**

> 'Belgium may not be blessed with exceptional talent but they will not be found wanting'

Powerhouse **Eric Van Meir** is another who can play in midfield but effectively provides cover for Staelens. **Philippe Leonard**, unlucky to miss the World Cup finals, should get the nod over **Marc Hendrikx** for the left-back slot, while **Eric Deflandre** is likely to come in on the right for the injured Regis Genaux, who is a considerable loss.

In **Yves Vanderhaeghe**, Waseige has found a ready successor for Franky Van der Elst's energetic, biting, stifling role in midfield. **Bart Goor**, **Johan Walem**, the goalscoring sensation **Gert Verheyen** and **Philippe Clement** dispute the other two berths, assuming that **Marc Wilmots** is delegated to perform just behind the front two.

The favourites to take the forward positions are **Luc Nilis** and **Branko Strupar**, but there is plenty of competition from the likes of **Toni Brogno**, **Gilles De Bilde** and the **Mpenzas**.

Squad pool

	Club	Age	Caps	Gls
GOALKEEPERS				
Geert DE VLIEGER	Willem II (Hol)	28	6	0
Filip DE WILDE	Anderlecht	35	29	0
Ronny GASPERCIC	Extremadura (Spa)	31	7	0
DEFENDERS				
Eric DEFLANDRE	Club Brugge	26	20	0
Marc HENDRIKX	Genk	25	7	0
Philippe LEONARD	Monaco (Fra)	25	16	0
Jacky PEETERS	Arminia Bielefeld (Ger)	30	4	0
Lorenzo STAELENS	Anderlecht	36	67	7
Joos VALGAEREN	Roda JC (Hol)	24	2	0
Eric VAN MEIR	Lierse	32	17	1
MIDFIELDERS				
Danny BOFFIN	Metz (Fra)	34	42	1
Philippe CLEMENT	Club Brugge	26	11	0
Bart GOOR	Anderlecht	27	15	2
Nico VAN KERCKHOVEN	Schalke (Ger)	29	22	2
Yves VANDERHAEGHE	Anderlecht	30	11	0
Gert VERHEYEN	Club Brugge	29	27	5
Johan WALEM	Parma (Ita)	28	20	1
Marc WILMOTS	Schalke (Ger)	31	45	16
FORWARDS				
Toni BROGNO	Westerlo	26	7	0
Gilles DE BILDE	Sheffield Wed (Eng)	29	22	1
Emile MPENZA	Schalke (Ger)	21	23	7
Mbo MPENZA	Sporting Lisbon (Por)	23	18	0
Luc NILIS	PSV Eindhoven (Hol)	33	52	10
Branko STRUPAR	Derby (Eng)	30	7	6

The view from Belgium

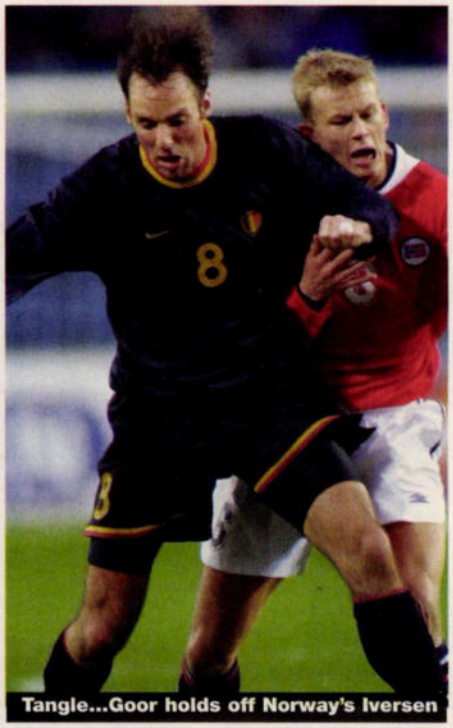
Jan Ceulemans
Former Belgium captain; now coach of Westerlo
"The national team is playing with so much self-belief and commitment these days that anything is possible. Especially with us having home advantage.

"The team is pretty solid, and in attack Strupar and Emile M'Penza are a great combination."

Raymond Goethals
Former Belgium coach
"You have to give credit to Robert Waseige. He's pulled the Red Devils out of a deep hole and made them a credible force once again.

"The Belgian team have a long history of going a long way without much fuel in the tank. We don't play so stylishly, but we are past masters at making life difficult for opponents. We have a disciplined and well-organised side and I don't think the Italians, Swedes and Turks will relish playing us."

THE INDISPENSABLE ONLINE GUIDE TO


Tangle...Goor holds off Norway's Iversen

For the record

HOW THEY QUALIFIED
As co-hosts

RESULTS SINCE FRANCE 98

18.11.98	Luxembourg-Belgium (friendly)	0-0
03.02.99	Cyprus-Belgium (Cyprus tnmt)	0-1
05.02.99	Belgium-Greece (Cyprus tnmt Final)	1-0
09.02.99	Belgium-Czech Republic (friendly)	0-1
27.03.99	Belgium-Bulgaria (friendly)	0-1
30.03.99	Belgium-Egypt (friendly)	0-1
28.04.99	Romania-Belgium (friendly)	1-0
30.05.99	Belgium-Peru (Kirin Cup, Japan)	1-1
03.06.99	Japan-Belgium (Kirin Cup, Japan)	0-0
05.06.99	South Korea-Belgium (friendly)	1-2
18.08.99	Belgium-Finland (friendly)	3-4
04.09.99	Holland-Belgium (friendly)	5-5
07.09.99	Belgium-Morocco (friendly)	4-0
10.10.99	England-Belgium (friendly)	2-1
13.11.99	Italy-Belgium (friendly)	1-3
23.02.00	Belgium-Portugal (friendly)	1-1
29.03.00	Belgium-Holland (friendly)	2-2
26.04.00	Norway-Belgium (friendly)	0-2

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS RECORD

1960	Did not enter
1964	1st round (no qualifying stage)
1968	Did not qualify
1972	3rd place
1976	Quarter-finalists
1980	Finalists
1984	Group stage
1988	Did not qualify
1992	Did not qualify
1996	Did not qualify

QUESTIONS TO THE COACH
Robert Waseige

Who are your favourites to win Euro 2000 and why?
France, Holland, Spain and the Czech Republic are my favourites. France, because of their status as world champions; Holland, as organising country; Spain, because sooner or later their national team will be as brilliant as their star clubs Real Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia; and, last but not least, the Czech Republic, because their players seem even better now than in 1996, when they reached the Final of the European Championship against Germany.

Who will be the star players of the tournament?
A difficult question. Let me say this: if Patrick Kluivert is as brilliant during the finals as he was when Belgium met Holland on March 29, he will be the number one. Otherwise, Zinedine Zidane is always a good alternative.

Who will be the surprises, and why? Who will be the most surprising youngsters?
Slovenia and Turkey. I was very impressed by the recent UEFA Cup Final between Arsenal and Galatasaray, and I suppose that many people realise now how tough the Turkish side will be. Among the youngsters, I think we can expect great things from Thierry Henry and Nicolas Anelka.

How do you rate the chances of your team? What stage can they reach?
I will be very satisfied if Belgium go through to the quarter-finals. At that stage, much will depend on the identity of the opponents and on the shape of the day.

How is your team preparation? Do you have enough time?
I'm very happy because I got the players earlier than expected as the schedule of the last two games in May [championship and Cup] has been modified. In those circumstances, the internationals were free a week early. And one week more together is, of course, very important.

What would you suggest to the referees?
The best thing, for them, would be to consider the players as their friends and not as their enemies.

Which will be, generally speaking, the tactical habits and the tactical novelties? Will teams be offensive or defensive?
I don't think there will be any novelty. I expect the national teams to play the same way as their top teams: offensively in the case of Holland and Spain, for instance, and defensively for the lower-ranked nations.

How do you see each group at Euro 2000?
I'm so busy with my own team that I don't really bother about the others. There will be time to concentrate on them at a later stage.

Do you think the fact that Holland and Belgium are co-hosting Euro 2000 will have more advantages or more disadvantages, and in which areas?
Neither Belgium nor Holland would have won the rights to Euro 2000 on their own. I hope this initiative will be seen as a model by other countries aiming to organise such an event, like Austria and Hungary, or the Scandinavian countries, for instance.

Do you think hooliganism will create problems during the championship?
I sincerely hope it won't. But I must admit I'm really scared when I hear that England doesn't know how to cope with it. If England, which is accustomed to that problem, doesn't know, how could we know?

Home advantage...Belgium

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Don't write them off

The big occasion could bring the best out of a team who have underwhelmed in recent months, says Paddy Agnew

AT FIRST glance, all the evidence would suggest that Italy are headed for a humiliating disaster at Euro 2000. Recent dismal performances by Dino Zoff's side and the unprecedented whitewash of normally all-dominant Italian clubs in European competition would both seem to add weight to the argument that this is not a bright moment for Italian soccer.

When you also consider the poor showings at recent European Championship finals, you could well be tempted to put Italy high on the list of possible first-round, big-name flops. After all, did not Italy go out in the first round of Euro 96 in England?

Worse still, is it not true that Italy failed entirely to qualify for two of the last four European Championships – France 84 and Sweden 92?

Curiously, however, these could well be precisely the conditions in which Italy spring a minor surprise and give a good showing. With their chances written off by much of the Italian sports media and with Dino Zoff under fierce pressure from a 56 million-strong army of armchair critics, this could be just the time when Italy come out to play.

Zoff himself is sure to recall Spain 82, when Italy, under his captaincy and under the coaching of Enzo Bearzot, fashioned a World Cup triumph out of a position of seemingly total adversity.

Facing defeat...Zambrotta versus Spain

It was significant to hear current national team captain Paolo Maldini, still a key figure in the side, warn critics not to read too much into poor friendly showings this spring. "When we get together in May for our training camp prior to Euro 2000, it'll be an entirely different Italy," he said. "When it really begins to matter, then Italy starts to play."

Maldini had better be right. Throughout the 1999-2000 season, Italy have performed well below their potential, losing three times – 3-2 to Denmark in a European qualifier last September, 3-1 to Belgium in a November friendly in Lecce, and 2-0 to Spain in a March friendly in Barcelona. In between times, Italy wrapped up their Euro 2000 place with a dull but effective 0-0 away draw to Belarus in October before recording distinctly underwhelming home friendly wins against Sweden in February and Portugal in April.

'Italy are unlikely to be the most flamboyant side around, but none of their opponents can expect an easy ride'

On paper, it hardly reads like European Championship-winning form. Yet Italian fans can take hope from the common thread running through this season's poor form. Namely, that nearly every game played mattered little or not at all. Italy had started so well in qualifying Group 1, winning their first three games including an away victory over their main rivals, Denmark, that by the time they drew 0-0 with Switzerland in Lausanne last June they were practically home and dry. The draw against Belarus secured them the single point they needed from their last two games to ensure qualification for the finals.

Perhaps more worrying than this season's poor form is the lack of world-class quality in the Italy squad, especially if key players such as striker Christian Vieri or defenders Alessandro Nesta and Maldini are sidelined. In that context, Zoff's spring has been ruined by an injury that has kept Vieri out of the Internazionale side. Along with all Italian fans, Zoff is hoping that Vieri recovers in time for Euro 2000. Without him, the attack is nothing less than the proverbial toothless wonder.

Zoff, too, has perplexed many observers this season by his apparent refusal to put trust in the playmaking talents of Roma's enigmatic Francesco Totti, widely considered to be one of the most gifted players of his generation.

Essential...Paolo Maldini

Zoff prefers to consider Totti as a striker, and opted to plunge Udinese's Stefano Fiore from relative obscurity into the national team in the role that might otherwise have been Totti's.

Zoff's rejection of Totti-the-playmaker has led many to conclude that his Italy will play a dull, negative, waiting game, with the emphasis on a mix of defensive organisation, midfield 'filter' and opportunist counter-attack.

But while such a conclusion is understandable, it is also mistaken. Throughout Zoff's days as a club coach, first with Juventus and then with Lazio, his sides were indeed always solid but never dull or negative. At Euro 2000, his Italy are unlikely to be the most flamboyant side around, but no one, starting with first-round opponents Turkey, Belgium and Sweden, can expect an easy ride.

After that, if the Maldini-Nesta-Vieri trio are fit and well and if Fiore continues to develop as he has started this spring, then Italy may not win Euro 2000 but they are certain to go out, at the quarter- or semi-final stage, with their guns blazing.

★ Star Man
Stefano Fiore

SIX MONTHS ago, not many people would have been thinking of Stefano Fiore in terms of Italy's Euro 2000 squad. Yet such has been the 25-year-old Udinese midfielder's remarkable season that he now stands poised to follow such famous names as Paolo Rossi and Toto Schillaci, who burst on to the international stage from relative obscurity at a major tournament.

Rossi had played only twice for Italy and Schillaci once before they both became international overnight sensations at the 1978 and 1990 World Cup finals respectively.

Fiore's impact at Euro 2000 may not prove quite so dramatic but he nonetheless stands poised to add a badly-needed element of invention and quality to Dino Zoff's team.

After Italy struggled last autumn, Zoff responded to widespread criticism by promising to experiment in springtime friendlies. Of the new players tried, none was more impressive than Fiore. He looked poised and skilful, despite playing in a side which was far from impressive in home wins against Sweden and Portugal and a defeat in Spain.

To some extent Fiore is Zoff's answer to the nationwide clamour to have Francesco Totti installed as the official midfield general. Less flamboyant than the Roma player (considered a striker, not a midfielder, by Zoff), Fiore is the quintessentially modern player, able to combine midfield filter duties in defence with traffic direction in attack, while also being capable of the occasional spectacular long-range goal.

The watershed in Fiore's career came about almost by accident. He was the £5.2million makeweight in the £22m deal that took Udinese's Brazilian striker Amoroso to Parma. Freed of the pressures of playing for one of Italy's 'magnificent seven', Fiore has blossomed. Guaranteed a regular place – unlike at Parma – and not over-burdened with responsibility, he made such progress that when Zoff did pick him, the coach knew he was trying out one of the best attacking midfielders in Serie A. What he did not bargain for was that Fiore would so outstrip other candidates at the audition that he found himself not so much with a useful reserve but a potential No 10 to play behind Christian Vieri and, probably, Alessandro Del Piero.

Fiore himself stresses that he is no playmaker but if Zoff asks him to play in that role, there is no problem. "I haven't really had time to sit down and talk it through with Zoff," he says. "If I am lucky enough to be part of the squad for Euro 2000, there'll be a month to sort everything out." After that, there could be a month when Europe becomes very familiar with the newest Italian boy on the block.

Paddy Agnew

Impressive audition...Stefano Fiore

ITALY

How they line up

ON THE October night last autumn that Italy wrapped up their Euro 2000 place with a dour but effective 0-0 draw against Belarus in Minsk, national coach Dino Zoff might have been excused for feeling quietly satisfied. After all, a qualification is a qualification, even if we might all have been happy to draw a veil over Italy's display. However, this is the age of soccer-biz and the Italian Football Federation's contract with state broadcaster RAI obliges the national team coach to give an immediate post-match TV interview.

Journalist Enrico Varriale got down to business straight away, asking: "Let's be frank, the best thing about tonight was the fact that we qualified?"

"I don't think you should draw conclusions like that," replied an irritated Zoff. "Leave that to those whose professional business it is…Don't talk to me about a big-name team having difficulty against a smaller one; look at France, the World Cup winners, held to draws by Iceland and Ukraine."

With that, he turned on his heels and headed into the freezing rain. For those of us who know the normally even-tempered Zoff, it was a surprise public display of annoyance. but also an indication that he was more than fed-up with the debate about the less than sparkling soccer played by his side over the past months.

It is argued that Zoff is too dull and too conservative in his tactical thinking. Many, it would seem, are just waiting for things to go wrong at Euro 2000 before calling for his dismissal. It could be that Zoff will disappoint them.

Whether the line-up be 3-5-2 (currently the preferred scheme) or 4-4-2, it matters little. Goalkeeper **Gianluigi Buffon** and a first-choice central defensive trio of **Fabio Cannavaro**, **Alessandro Nesta** and captain **Paolo Maldini** guarantee solidity, allowing two wide midfielders (**Gianluca Pessotto** on the left, **Gianluca Zambrotta** or **Diego Fuser** on the right) time and space to double up as attacking wingers or emergency full-backs. Defensive cover is provided by **Mark Iuliano**, **Paolo Negro**, **Giuseppe Pancaro** and the versatile **Ciro Ferrara**.

In the centre of midfield, **Demetrio Albertini**, **Luigi Di Biagio**, **Antonio Conte** and **Massimo Ambrosini** (the four are in competition for two places) guarantee effective 'filter', allowing the one potentially creative element, **Stefano Fiore**, to set things up for the ideal attacking combination of **Christian Vieri** and **Alessandro Del Piero** (or **Francesco Totti**). **Filippo Inzaghi**, **Vincenzo Montella** and **Marco Delvecchio** are the other candidates for the forward positions.

> 'Many people are just waiting for it all to go wrong before calling for Zoff's head…but he could surprise them'

Zoff's biggest concern relates to absentees. When Maldini and Nesta were out through injury, the defence looked distinctly leaky. If Vieri fails to recover fully from an injury that interrupted the last two months of his season, the attack is quite simply Hamlet without the Prince.

Zoff would appear to have largely based his team on the tried and trusted national virtues of solid defence, tough midfield and opportunist attack. It is hard to see what else he could do. Not that such a consideration will save him from the sack if Italy go out before the semi-final stage.

Squad pool

	Club	Age	Caps	Gls
GOALKEEPERS				
Francesco ANTONIOLI	Roma	30	0	0
Gianluigi BUFFON	Parma	22	13	0
Francesco TOLDO	Fiorentina	28	7	0
DEFENDERS				
Fabio CANNAVARO	Parma	26	33	0
Ciro FERRARA	Juventus	33	47	0
Mark IULIANO	Juventus	26	4	0
Paolo MALDINI	Milan	31	103	7
Paolo NEGRO	Lazio	28	6	0
Alessandro NESTA	Lazio	24	23	0
Giuseppe PANCARO	Lazio	28	4	0
Gianluca PESSOTTO	Juventus	29	13	0
MIDFIELDERS				
Demetrio ALBERTINI	Milan	28	65	2
Massimo AMBROSINI	Milan	23	4	0
Dino BAGGIO	Parma	28	59	7
Antonio CONTE	Juventus	30	16	1
Luigi DI BIAGIO	Internazionale	29	15	1
Angelo DI LIVIO	Fiorentina	33	27	0
Stefano FIORE	Udinese	25	3	0
Diego FUSER	Parma	31	24	2
Gianluca ZAMBROTTA	Juventus	23	5	0
FORWARDS				
Alessandro DEL PIERO	Juventus	25	29	10
Marco DELVECCHIO	Roma	27	3	0
Filippo INZAGHI	Juventus	26	19	6
Vincenzo MONTELLA	Roma	25	3	0
Francesco TOTTI	Roma	23	11	1
Christian VIERI	Internazionale	26	20	10

The view from Italy

Amedeo Goria
RAI Sport
"Our problem lies in midfield. There's just not enough invention in this area, and ultimately the absence of a quality playmaker may undermine our chances. In every part of the field Italy look strong. Buffon is a fine keeper; a defence led by Maldini and Nesta is as good a guarantee as you'll get; and, provided he's fit, Christian Vieri will always score goals.

"I see the *azzurri* as a strong unit, but the lack of fantasy in midfield means they will struggle to get to the top of the podium."

Giorgio Chinaglia
Former Italy and Lazio striker
"Italy's preparations for the finals have not been the best. In my opinion, Dino Zoff has used too many players; bringing on five and six substitutes in a friendly is a pointless exercise. It's worrying that Vieri has missed a lot of this season because of injury. Without him, we might be in trouble.

"Pippo Inzaghi and Montella have gone off

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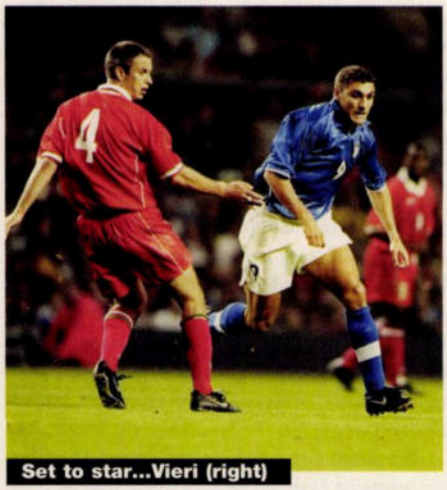
the boil and Del Piero hasn't looked the same since his knee injury.

"Italy are due a good tournament after failing at Euro 96 and France 98, but the signs aren't particularly promising. I pray I'm wrong."



Set to star...Vieri (right)

For the record

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

GROUP 1		
05.09.98	Wales-Italy	0-2
10.10.98	Italy-Switzerland	2-0
27.03.99	Denmark-Italy	1-2
31.03.99	Italy-Belarus	1-1
05.06.99	Italy-Wales	4-0
09.06.99	Switzerland-Italy	0-0
08.09.99	Italy-Denmark	2-3
09.10.99	Belarus-Italy	0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Italy*	8	4	3	1	13	5	15
Denmark	8	4	2	2	11	8	14
Switzerland	8	4	2	2	9	5	14
Wales	8	3	0	5	7	16	9
Belarus	8	0	3	5	4	10	3

**Italy qualified as group winners*

OTHER RESULTS SINCE SUMMER 1999

13.11.99	Italy-Belgium (friendly)	1-3
23.02.00	Italy-Sweden (friendly)	1-0
29.03.00	Spain-Italy (friendly)	2-0
26.04.00	Italy-Portugal (friendly)	2-0

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS RECORD

1960	Did not enter
1964	2nd round (no qualifying stage)
1968	Winners
1972	Quarter-finalists
1976	Did not qualify
1980	4th place
1984	Did not qualify
1988	Semi-finalists
1992	Did not qualify
1996	Group stage

QUESTIONS TO THE COACH
Dino Zoff

Who are your favourites to win Euro 2000 and why?
Spain – they have young but experienced players, enthusiasm is high after their club sides' successful season, and the national team have been consistently good for two years under Camacho; France – they are world champions and, in comparison to France 98, their forwards are in good shape, such as Henry, Trezeguet and Anelka; and Holland – they have home advantage and a lot of brilliant individuals.

Who will be the star players of the tournament?
Raul, Zidane, Kluivert, Figo and Vieri.

Which players and teams will cause a surprise?
Owen, Henry and Totti as players; Sweden and Portugal as teams.

How do you rate Italy's chances? What stage can they reach?
Italy are not among the favourites for the first time in history. It won't be easy to get through the first round group [Turkey, Belgium and Sweden], but if we do we can go all the way to the Final. To win the tournament a team needs good luck.

Are you happy with the amount of time you will have to prepare for the tournament, and how are your players shaping up?
Italian players are tired after a tough championship. There is never enough time to prepare, but I will try to let the players recover and start the tournament fresh in body and, above all, in mind.

How would you recommend that referees handle the games at Euro 2000?
To let the game go, fairly but with rhythm. I would suggest that they don't stop the game too often and, of course, to adhere strictly to the laws of the game. But I know that uniformity in refereering is a kind of pipedream.

What do you think the general pattern of play will be – defensive or attack-minded? Will there be any tactical innovations?
I expect a tournament where, as always, not to lose will be more important than to win, at least at the beginning. But from the quarter-finals on, the game will be more open and the key will be freshness, athletic power and to have the players who are able to decide a match by a single move. Dead-ball situations will be important.

How do you see the different groups shaping up at Euro 2000?
The groups are all difficult, and the more traditional European powers – Italy, France, England, Germany and Holland – run the risk of being eliminated after the first stage.

Do you think there will be more advantages or disadvantages in the fact that the tournament is being staged jointly by Holland and Belgium?
Holland and Belgium are so close, and not only geographically, that nobody, not even the players, will realise the tournament is being played in two countries. The venues are so close to each other that a team can stay in the same place throughout the tournament, leaving their camp only a few hours before a match and returning the same evening.

Do you think hooliganism will be a problem?
The problem has been so studied for so long that the police and the organisers will be ready to tackle any situation that might arise.

Tough group...the Italians face a difficult first round

AT WWW.WORLDSOCCER.COM

Tough nuts to crack

Sweden may get no points for entertainment but they know their strengths, writes Pentti Hietanen

New hope...Sweden are looking to Jorgen Pettersson to boost their attack

SWEDEN'S recent displays do not suggest that they are capable of entertaining the fans during Euro 2000. Since the 4-0 drubbing by Spain in March 1998, the national team's games have mostly been either low-score draws or decided by the odd goal.

But though their football may be less than exciting to watch, the Swedes offer no excuses. At the moment they are one of the most difficult teams to derail – and they know it.

Under previous coach Tommy Svensson, Sweden were able to call on a unique trio of finishers – Tomas Brolin, Martin Dahlin and Kennet Andersson, who between them scored nearly 90 goals at full international level – and were capable of handing out thrashings such as the defeats of Austria (6-0), Denmark (4-0), Israel (5-0) and Bulgaria (4-0), the latter in the third-place match at the 1994 World Cup finals.

Those heady days are now long gone, and the most pressing question today must be: is there enough goalscoring prowess in the team?

At the root of the problem lies the absence of Celtic's Henrik Larsson, who broke a leg last autumn just as he was beginning to hit top form. Bologna's battle-hardened Kennet Andersson continues in his vital role as target man, but he is no longer the goal-getting force of former years. The lack of a player to partner the big, brawny Andersson soon became apparent.

The joint coaches, Tommy Soderberg and Lars Lagerback, needed a finisher, someone who could react to half-chances in the box, but were starting to feel desperate. Then a potential saviour appeared in the shape of Kaiserslautern's Jorgen Pettersson, a player who only four months ago looked unlikely even to make the squad. As a bench-warmer for the Bundesliga club, Pettersson was definitely out of the picture. However, during the winter break in Germany the chirpy forward, who originally hails from Malmo, pleaded with his coach, Otto Rehhagel, either to give him a decent run in the team or to sell him. Rehhagel recalled the Swede and suddenly the goals started to flow again.

This earned Pettersson a starting place in the Sweden line-up for the friendly against Italy in Palermo in February, and another against Austria the following month, when he scored a late equaliser.

Pettersson's brilliant goal in the 1-0 win in Denmark at the end of April, a looping shot over Peter Schmeichel, must have been like an answer to the coaches' prayers. Sweden's puff had at least produced some fire.

But despite there being some renewed hope on the attacking front, an unlucky run of injuries could serve to undermine Sweden's carefully laid plans. Apart from Larsson, Sunderland's Stefan Schwarz is also out after rupturing an Achilles tendon. The latest victims are an AIK pair, defender Pontus Kamark and forward Andreas Andersson, both because of long-term knee injuries. Veteran full-back Roland Nilsson has a calf strain, and Arsenal's Freddie Ljungberg has been struggling to recover from a rib injury.

'No superstars or pin-ups in the team – just a bunch of gritty Scandinavians who know their stuff'

The loss of Schwarz is a major blow. His importance to Sweden is immense, not only because of his vigorous displays in midfield, but also his ability to give confidence to his team-mates.

Sweden's first Euro 2000 game, the tournament's opening match, against Belgium in Brussels on June 10, will probably go a long way to deciding their fate. One thing is for sure: Soderberg and Lagerback are too conservative to try anything fancy or unexpected. Sweden will play to their strengths, rely on an aggressive, well-drilled defensive unit and hit back more and more frequently down the flanks. It may not look pretty, it may not produce a feast of goals. But taking on a team like Sweden, whose sum is much greater than their individual parts, can be an awesome task.

No superstars, no pin-ups – just a bunch of gritty Scandinavians who know their stuff.

★ Star Man
Kennet Andersson

AFTER five seasons in Italy with Bari, Lazio and Bologna, Serie A holds no secrets for veteran Swedish striker Kennet Andersson. Looking forward to his team's first-round clash with Italy, the 32-year-old has no time for those who believe the *azzurri* will take their vulnerability of recent months into the tournament.

"While Belgium as hosts and Turkey are to be respected, I think the Italians will be our toughest first-round opponents," says Andersson, who rejoined Bologna last autumn after a couple of months on the bench at Lazio.

"Italy are never more dangerous than when they are being written off. They haven't been particularly convincing in either the qualifiers or recent friendlies; they certainly did not excite me when they beat us 1-0 in a friendly earlier this year. But when the serious business begins I fully expect them to be among the strongest challengers.

"They lack neither players who can battle nor those with inspirational ability, and up front they have players to put fear into any defence. In Vieri – if he's fit – the two Inzaghis, Del Piero, Montella and Totti, they have forwards with all the attributes: physical presence, agility, technique and imagination. There's probably not another country in Europe with such explosive attacking potential.

"We've lost key men like Henrik Larsson, Stefan Schwarz, Pontus Kamark and Andreas Andersson, and on a technical level Sweden probably can't compete with the likes of the Italians. But I'm still confident of our chances. If we play with our usual speed, intensity and application, we can make the quarter-finals. And from there on, who knows?"

Six years ago, Andersson was Sweden's top scorer at the USA World Cup with five goals, and continues to play a fundamental role as the target man, a gangling figure equally capable of setting up goals as scoring them. For a long while his game revolved around his strength in the air and 'up-and-at-'em' approach, and the overall impression was one of effective clumsiness. But since moving to Italian football, both his touch and shooting have improved considerably. No less a player than ex-Bologna team-mate Roberto Baggio rates him most highly.

"I've always been a player who works hard for the team," says Andersson. "But my time in Italy has definitely made me a better player. I've become more aware, and my technique and movement off the ball are better. Coaches here have encouraged me to be more mobile and my game has benefited. I hope to prove it at Euro 2000."

Nick Bidwell

Target man...Kennet Andersson

SWEDEN

How they line up

SWEDEN's coaches are keen to keep a settled side, and for several positions there is no realistic competition. However, injuries to key players such as Stefan Schwarz and Pontus Kamark have forced some alterations in the starting line-up.

A 20-man squad was announced on May 18, with two attacking places being kept open in the hope that Henrik Larsson would recover in time.

In goal, **Magnus Hedman** is preferred to **Mattias Asper** and **Magnus Kihlstedt**. It is difficult to say which one of the latter pair is the current number two, though Kihlstedt had a good second half against Denmark in April.

In the zonal-marking back four, right-back **Roland Nilsson** and stoppers **Patrik Andersson** and **Joachim Bjorklund** are permanent fixtures.

There are question marks over the fitness of 36-year-old Nilsson. His stand-in, **Olof Mellberg**, is inexperienced at international level but did a steady job against Italy in February.

Skipper Andersson doesn't appear to have any outstanding physical qualities, and even lacks pace, but is hardly ever caught out.

The left-back position has been a problem for ages. Attack-minded **Gary Sundgren** will take over from the injured Kamark. In an emergency, Bjorklund can fill in. **Teddy Lucic** has a vital 'play anywhere' attitude. **Johan Mjallby** is also an option at stopper.

The ideal midfield would be **Niclas Alexandersson** on the right, Mjallby and **Daniel Andersson** in the middle, **Freddie Ljungberg** on the left. Mjallby has the unenviable task of trying to replace the injured Schwarz as the midfield director. Daniel Andersson plays in a smooth, quietly efficient way. Ljungberg has hardly figured in Sweden's build-up to the Euro finals because of injuries and club commitments, but he remains a key figure. Alexandersson blows hot and cold, but can operate on the right or left. The latter would leave space for the hard-working **Hakan Mild**.

Anders Andersson could be Soderberg-Lagerback's trump card in midfield. Against Italy, he proved that he can be a useful creator. However, another Denmark-based midfielder, **Magnus Svensson**, has been out of form lately.

Up front, veteran **Kennet Andersson** leads the line, hoping to get the first bite of the crosses floated over by either Alexandersson or Ljungberg.

> 'Injuries to key players such as Stefan Schwarz and Pontus Kamark have forced changes to the starting XI'

The big question is whether a gamble is taken on the fitness of **Henrik Larsson**. A space was left for him in the final 22 and if he proves his fitness, it will be a huge boost. But doubts remain over his ability to last the tournament.

Jorgen Pettersson remains Andersson's likeliest partner after scoring against Austria and Denmark. **Yksel Osmanovski** may not be the most disciplined player, but his inclusion could prevent the attack from becoming too predictable.

Marcus Allback was the favourite to fill one of the two remaining berths. He shines in the domestic League, but can struggle against better defences. There has been a lot of support for 19-year-old **Johan Elmander**, who has been likened to Tomas Brolin. **Mattias Jonsson** and **Stefan Selakovic** are long-shots who could sneak in.

Squad pool

	Club	Age	Caps	Gls
GOALKEEPERS				
Mattias ASPER	AIK Stockholm	26	2	0
Magnus HEDMAN	Coventry (Eng)	27	21	0
Magnus KIHLSTEDT	Brann Bergen (Nor)	28	6	0
DEFENDERS				
Patrik ANDERSSON	Bayern Munich (Ger)	28	75	2
Joachim BJORKLUND	Valencia (Spa)	29	71	0
Tomas GUSTAFSSON	Coventry (Eng)	27	2	0
Teddy LUCIC	AIK Stockholm	27	29	0
Olof MELLBERG	R Santander (Spa)	22	2	0
Roland NILSSON	Helsingborgs	36	110	1
Gary SUNDGREN	Zaragoza (Spa)	32	27	1
MIDFIELDERS				
Niclas ALEXANDERSSON	Sheffield Wed (Eng)	28	40	5
Anders ANDERSSON	AaB (Den)	26	13	2
Daniel ANDERSSON	Bari (Ita)	22	18	0
Fredrik LJUNGBERG	Arsenal (Eng)	23	13	2
Hakan MILD	IFK Gothenburg	29	55	6
Johan MJALLBY	Celtic (Sco)	28	17	2
Magnus SVENSSON	Brondby (Den)	31	11	0
FORWARDS				
Marcus ALLBACK	Orgryte	26	4	1
Kennet ANDERSSON	Bologna (Ita)	32	74	31
Johan ELMANDER	Orgryte	19	0	0
Mattias JONSSON	Brondby (Den)	26	13	1
Henrik LARSSON	Celtic (Sco)	28	46	10
Yksel OSMANOVSKI	Bari (Ita)	23	5	2
Jorgen PETTERSSON	Kaiserslautern (Ger)	25	22	7
Stefan SELAKOVIC	Halmstads	23	0	0

The view from Sweden

Mats Olsson
Expressen
"No team can surpass us in terms of pure defending or organisation. But without Ljungberg we are not a pretty team to watch. We don't offer much up front, but that has become typically Swedish. And what has happened to our much-publicised midfield diamond formation?"

Sune Sylven
Svenska Dagbladet
"Fredrik Ljungberg has been the only player for the past two seasons to provide any originality. Other players aren't irreplaceable. But if Ljungberg isn't fit to play, we must have more courage to experiment. Our coaches must be more willing to take risks.

"It has been suggested that the talented Johan Elmander from our U-21 side be teamed with his club-mate Marcus Allback. Is there any real proof that a player cannot do it while still young? It is better to make mistakes as a youngster than as a veteran. What if Elmander proved to be another Tomas Brolin?"

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Bo Johansson
Denmark's Swedish coach
"Playing against Sweden is more like a long fight than football. Kennet Andersson is still a giant up front, a difficult man to pin down."

Klas Ingesson
Bologna and Sweden midfielder
"It is important for us to attack down the wings. Only then will Kennet Andersson come in to his own. When he can operate closer to the goal, he is bound to create havoc."

Torbjorn Petersson
Daggens Nyheter
"To succeed at Euro 2000, I wish our midfield would read: Ljungberg, Ljungberg, Ljungberg.
"Also, what's the use of playing friendlies like the one against Denmark, where most of the football was just shit? Our coaches are not any the wiser for the experience."

For the record

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

GROUP 5		
05.09.98	Sweden-England	2-1
14.10.98	Bulgaria-Sweden	0-1
27.03.99	Sweden-Luxembourg	2-0
31.03.99	Poland-Sweden	0-1
05.06.99	England-Sweden	0-0
04.09.99	Sweden-Bulgaria	1-0
08.09.99	Luxembourg-Sweden	0-1
09.10.99	Sweden-Poland	2-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sweden*	8	7	1	0	10	1	22
England	8	3	4	1	14	4	13
Poland	8	4	1	3	12	8	13
Bulgaria	8	2	2	4	6	8	8
Luxembourg	8	0	0	8	2	23	0

**Sweden qualified as group winners*

OTHER RESULTS SINCE SUMMER 1999

18.08.99	Sweden-Austria (friendly)	0-0
27.11.99	South Africa-Sweden (friendly)	1-0
31.01.00	Sweden-Denmark (Nordic Cup)	1-0
04.02.00	Sweden-Norway (Nordic Cup)	1-1
23.02.00	Italy-Sweden (friendly)	1-0
29.03.00	Austria-Sweden (friendly)	1-1
26.04.00	Denmark-Sweden (friendly)	0-1

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS RECORD

1960	Did not enter
1964	Quarter-finalists
1968	Did not qualify
1972	Did not qualify
1976	Did not qualify
1980	Did not qualify
1984	Did not qualify
1988	Did not qualify
1992	Semi-finalists
1996	Did not qualify

QUESTIONS TO THE COACHES
Tommy Soderberg & Lars Lagerback

Who are your favourites to win Euro 2000 and why?
Holland, France or Spain. Holland because of home advantage; France because of experience; Spain because of form. All three because they have very big selections of highly skilled players.

Who will be the star players?
Zinedine Zidane, Raul and Patrick Kluivert.

Who will be the surprises and why? Who will be the most surprising youngsters?
There will definitely be young and surprising players, new Michael Owens. But it is very hard to predict who they will be. Among the teams every one has a good chance, so there is no room for sensations.

How do you rate the chances of your team? What stage can they reach?
Our first ambition is to advance from our group, to reach the quarter-finals.

Are you happy with your preparations? Have you had enough time?
Under the circumstances we are quite satisfied.

What would you suggest to the referees?
Dare to punish brutal play. Dare to follow the rulebook.

What will be the tactical trends and the tactical novelty? Will they be attacking or defensive?
It is very much in the hands of the referees. If they punish brutal play according to the rulebook there will be a lot of room for attacking and offensive play and players. We will see many quick switches, teams changing rapidly from defence to attack.

How do you see each group going at Euro 2000?
Most of the groups are very close and hard to predict, especially ours, which we don't even want to predict! All four teams have a chance to win the group and advance to the quarter-finals. Spain are clear Group C favourites, while Holland and France must be picked to reach the quarter-finals from their group.

Do you think the fact that Holland and Belgium are co-hosting Euro 2000 will have more advantages or more disadvantages, and in which areas?
It is definitely a big challenge for the organisers. But we will have to wait and see the outcome.

Do you think hooliganism will create problems?
We can only hope that won't be the case.

You will be the only team at Euro 2000 with two coaches. Why do you have this approach?
Because it fits our leadership, our personalities and our players. It does not necessarily fit every coach and team, but we believe that this kind of shared leadership will become much more common in the future.

All together...team spirit is the key for Sweden

Feast or famine

There is simply no knowing what will happen to Denizli's squad, says Hasan Cemali

TURKEY will go into Euro 2000 hoping desperately for better results than they had in England four years ago.

Then, a useful-looking squad, coached by the highly-rated Fatih Terim, had been tipped to do well, but instead had an awful tournament, losing all three first-round games without the consolation of a single goal.

This time expectations are much lower and the general opinion seems to be that a win will be welcome and anything more will be marvellous.

A two-day training session as the domestic season drew to an end was marred by the absence of goalkeeper Rustu Recber of Fenerbahce, out through injury. The little-known Omer Catkic of Gaziantepspor was drafted in to replace him. Another new inclusion was Leicester City midfielder Muzzy Izzet, who had once harboured thoughts of playing for England.

Coach Mustafa Denizli's squad, loaded with no fewer than 10 players from UEFA Cup winners Galatasaray, also featured striker Oktay Derelioglu, once a regular international but out of form since leaving Besiktas for Gaziantepspor.

Denizli has done well since replacing Terim as national coach, especially in getting Turkey to the finals – thanks in part to Terim's earlier efforts.

Terim in turn led Gala to a great achievement in winning this season's UEFA Cup, and has ensured that the club have become the dominant force in the domestic game instead of merely one of the Big Four with Besiktas, Fenerbahce and Trabzonspor.

Gala under Terim play attractive attacking football and are accustomed to winning. The national squad are not similarly conditioned to win and often do not appear to believe that attack is the best form of defence.

'The national squad are not conditioned to win and often don't appear to believe attack is the best form of defence'

Despite this, Denizli's achievement cannot be under-estimated. The national team won five out of eight of their qualifying games, drew 0-0 away to Germany, and their 1-0 defeat of the group favourites at home was one of the most important results in Turkish history.

Denizli had some midfield and defensive problems, and his decision to stick with Alpay, Ogun, Abdullah and Tayfun, all of whom were showing variable form, showed that he is a man of great determination. Despite heavy criticism he had his reward when his team reached the finals by beating the Republic of Ireland in the play-offs.

The right-back position could be a problem. Ali Eren Beserler of Besiktas started in the last six qualifiers, but has fallen out with his club and lack of action cost him his place in the national squad. Another query concerns Suat Kaya, a strong midfielder for Gala, but at 32 lacking in stamina.

Tayfur Havutcu, Turkey's top scorer in the qualifiers, and one of Denizli's favourite players, has shown his versatility in defence and in a supporting role behind the attackers. But in the end a lot will depend on Hakan Sukur, top scorer in the domestic League for the past three years.

On hold...Hakan Sukur and Lothar Matthaus

Stepping up...Turkey beat the Republic of Ireland to qualify for the finals

★ Star Man
Sergen Yalcin

THE BAD BOY has earned his parole. After years of alleged crimes and misdemeanours, the most talented Turk of his generation, midfield general Sergen Yalcin, is going straight in a bid for European Championship glory.

Over the years, Sergen's detractors have had a field day compiling his charge-sheet, citing his laziness and excessive individualism on the pitch, a playboy lifestyle and addiction to gambling off it, and countless scrapes with authority.

He was shown the door by impoverished Istanbulspor in early 1999 and contrived to be thrown out by Fenerbahce mid-way through this season after a bust-up with the club's then coach Zdenek Zeman.

But now most Turks are inclined to offer clemency to the once-wayward star.

Sergen was arguably the national team's most influential player on the road to Euro 2000, adroitly pulling the strings just behind the strikers, and he has been similarly impressive since moving to Galatasaray in January. He was not qualified to play for Gala in the UEFA Cup, but made a major contribution to their domestic League and Cup double.

"I'm used to being attacked," says Sergen. "I'm criticised for lack of fitness, for not doing enough defensive work, for all sorts of so-called faults. It doesn't bother me any more. I've given my answer to the critics out on the pitch. I've proved that I'm a good player, that I know how to create, to dictate the play. People should take me as I am. I am not a destroyer, I am a creator."

He is justified in emphasising the realities of his footballing make-up. With the likes of Tayfur, Tugay, Emre and Abdullah to provide the hustle and bustle in midfield, Sergen should be allowed to do what he does best – skilfully probe and carve out openings for Hakan Sukur and company in attack.

Sergen was a member of the Turkish squad which somewhat predictably slumped to three straight first-round defeats at Euro 96. This time, he claims there will be no repeat performance.

"We had expected to do much better in England. But we were very naive, our inexperience of big tournaments worked against us. We will not make the same errors at Euro 2000. Turkish football is improving all the time. Look at Galatasaray. This season they have beaten Milan, Hertha Berlin, Bologna, Mallorca, Dortmund, Leeds and Arsenal – all very strong sides. We can compete.

"We're all 150 per cent motivated. There's a lot of pride at stake for us. We must not miss this chance to show what we are worth."

Nick Bidwell

Doing his own thing...Sergen Yalcin

TURKEY

How they line up

THE Turkish team play a well-disciplined game that breaks down only under extreme pressure. For coach Mustafa Denizli, flexibility is the key.

"We have played against such teams as Northern Ireland. They play physical football but we have players who could cope with it. We tried different systems on our road to success. We can play in many other set-ups. Turkey have played 3-5-2, 4-4-2 and even tried 3-4-3.

"We don't depend on one system. We are not static. To be flexible is our advantage."

Naturally, Denizli is focusing most of his attention on Turkey's opening meeting, with Italy, in Arnhem on June 11. "Before everything I shall put myself in the place of Dino Zoff and work out what sort of system he would put into practice against Turkey. I shall construct a possible Italian side and work out the system Zoff is thinking of applying against us. Then I shall know how to select the Turkish side against Italy.

"I shall do the same against Belgium and Sweden."

Given that Italy will most likely play with a cautious 3-5-2 system, while Belgium and Sweden favour 4-4-2, Denizli has his work cut out.

In goal, **Rustu Recber** is a solid and dependable number one. His Fenerbahce club-mate Engin Ipekoglu is out of the running for a squad place, so either of the inexperienced **Fevzi Tuncay** and **Omer Catkic** will take the second goalkeeping spot.

In a back four, **Ogun Temizkanoglu** and **Alpay Ozalan** are the first-choice centre-backs, with Ogun playing the libero role and Alpay acting as stopper. Against the Italians, who will look to hit the Turks on the counter-attack, Ogun may find himself stepping up into midfield. Both full-backs, **Tayfun Korkut** (left) and **Umit Davala** (right), like to attack, and can be moved into midfield if needed.

Other options in defence include **Bulent Korkmaz**, a rock at the heart of Galatasaray's defence in their UEFA Cup run.

Hakan Unsal is another option at left-back, with Tayfun moving over to the right, but he is more likely to play a central/left role in midfield.

In front of Hakan Unsal, **Abdullah Ercan** provides pace and flair on the left flank, while the versatile **Tayfur Havutcu** works hard up and down on the right.

> 'Hakan Sukur is the focal point of the attack, with all paths leading to the Galatasaray striker'

Sergen Yalcin is the main creative source in midfield, carving out openings for the attackers.

Tugay Kerimoglu could come into contention on the left of midfield, while **Muzzy Izzet** is most likely to be used as a substitute to provide more attacking impetus from midfield. **Okan Buruk** is another attack-minded option in midfield.

Hakan Sukur is the focal point of the attack, with all paths leading to the Galatasaray striker. **Arif Erdem** is the most likely partner for Hakan Sukur, but is likely to play deeper and wider on the right. **Oktay Derelioglu** is another option in attack, but has not been in the best of form.

Squad pool

	Club	Age	Caps	Gls
GOALKEEPERS				
FEVZI Tuncay	Besiktas	22	1	0
OMER Catkic	Gaziantepspor	25	0	0
RUSTU Recber	Fenerbahce	27	42	0
DEFENDERS				
ALPAY Ozalan	Fenerbahce	27	45	1
BULENT Korkmaz	Galatasaray	31	55	1
EMRE Asik	Istanbulspor	26	9	1
FATIH Akyel	Galatasaray	22	14	0
OGUN Temizkanoglu	Fenerbahce	30	60	5
OSMAN Ozkolylu	Trabzonspor	28	5	0
TAYFUN Korkut	Real Sociedad (Spa)	26	23	0
UMIT Bozkurt	Denizlispor	24	0	0
UMIT Davala	Galatasaray	26	7	0
MIDFIELDERS				
ABDULLAH Ercan	Fenerbahce	28	52	0
AYHAN Akman	Besiktas	23	6	0
EMRE Belezoglu	Galatasaray	20	1	0
ERGUN Penbe	Galatasaray	27	2	0
HAKAN Unsal	Galatasaray	27	13	0
Muzzy IZZET	Leicester (Eng)	25	0	0
MERT Korkmaz	Gaziantepspor	28	6	0
OKAN Buruk	Galatasaray	26	10	0
SERGEN Yalcin	Galatasaray	27	29	5
SUAT Kaya	Galatasaray	32	7	1
TAYFUR Havutcu	Besiktas	30	22	5
TUGAY Kerimoglu	Rangers (Sco)	29	56	2
FORWARDS				
ARIF Erdem	Galatasaray	28	33	6
HAKAN Sukur	Galatasaray	28	52	26
OKTAY Derelioglu	Gaziantepspor	24	13	8

The view from Turkey

Altan Tanrikulu
Turkish Daily News

"Everything started for Turkish football 16 years ago. Germany put in disappointing displays at the 1984 European Championship finals and parted company with their national coach, Jupp Derwall.

"Derwall then came to Turkey to join Galatasaray, where he worked for four years, and had Fatih Terim and Mustafa Denizli working with him as assistants. Terim and Denizli have gone on to become Turkey's most successful managers – Galatasaray under Terim winning the UEFA Cup this season and Denizli taking Turkey to the Euro 2000 finals.

"The national team has the players to be successful. They know each other very well and have played together for a long time. Rustu is a reliable goalkeeper, Sergen controls the midfield and Hakan Sukur is an effective striker. Emre, Suat, Okan and Tayfur are quality players who give their all for the

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whole 90 minutes. Up front, Arif and Oktay are both strikers who have the ability to surprise.

"Turkey played only one preparation game and lost to Norway 2-0. Denizli did not want to play any more because he feels the Turkish press over-exaggerate the importance of such games and as a result players lose their confidence. Denizli certainly does not want his players to be demoralised by the press.

"When it comes to the finals, anything could happen. Turkey could finish bottom of their group or they could make it to the Final on July 2.t

"Over the last two years Turkey have beaten Holland, Germany, Sweden and the Republic of Ireland, but lost to Albania and Israel. With that in mind, no result from their Euro 2000 games would cause a surprise."

For the record

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

GROUP 3		
05.09.98	Turkey-Northern Ireland	3-0
10.10.98	Turkey-Germany	1-0
14.10.98	Turkey-Finland	1-3
27.03.99	Turkey-Moldova	2-0
05.06.99	Finland-Turkey	2-4
04.09.99	Northern Ireland-Turkey	0-3
08.09.99	Moldova-Turkey	1-1
09.10.99	Germany-Turkey	0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany	8	6	1	1	20	4	19
Turkey*	8	5	2	1	15	6	17
Finland	8	3	1	4	13	13	10
N Ireland	8	1	2	5	4	19	5
Moldova	8	0	4	4	7	17	4

**Turkey qualified for the play-offs as runners-up*

PLAY-OFFS

13.11.99	Republic of Ireland-Turkey	1-1
17.11.99	Turkey-Republic of Ireland	0-0

Agg 1-1. Turkey qualified for the finals on away goals

OTHER RESULTS SINCE SUMMER 1999

23.02.00	Turkey-Norway (friendly)	0-2

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS RECORD

1960	1st round (no qualifying stage)
1964	1st round (no qualifying stage)
1968	Did not qualify
1972	Did not qualify
1976	Did not qualify
1980	Did not qualify
1984	Did not qualify
1988	Did not qualify
1992	Did not qualify
1996	Group stage

QUESTIONS TO THE COACH
Mustafa Denizli

Galatasaray have just won the UEFA Cup, becoming the first Turkish team ever to win a European prize. Does that give the national team more confidence going into Euro 2000?
Winning that cup probably creates more problems, because the Galatasaray players now think they have already achieved enough. We have eight or nine Galatasaray players in the squad. Now I'm thinking about their physical and mental tiredness. I must find a new training programme for them. And we have a second group of players, who have won nothing yet this season. So we have two minds in the team.

Of course it makes our preparation harder. Some players are more than tired, while others are waiting to play and think they now have to win something in 2000.

At Euro 96, the team lost all three matches without scoring a goal. You have been in charge since August 1996. How do you assess Turkey's chances this time?
Euro 96 was a little bit premature. Nobody was expecting us to get to the finals. Reaching the finals was itself the target, nothing more. But a lot has changed since. We now know what Turkish football is worth in Europe. Our attitude will be almost 100 per cent different. Now there is a cup waiting for us. Nobody believed this was the case in 1996.

Who will be your key players?
It depends on who is playing against us. Depending on that team, we will have different key players.

Which of your young players should we look out for?
We don't have too many young players, but Mustafa Izzet from Leicester City perhaps. I don't spend too much time on names. I think about teams.

And the key players of the other countries?
This season I have been impressed by a couple of players from Spanish sides: Raul, maybe the goalkeeper [Santiago Canizares]. And Tore Andre Flo has been one of the names to come up from the Norwegian side. I don't know the latest situation regarding Michael Owen.

But I don't think it will be stars that dominate this tournament. It will be teams. The teams with the most stars will probably lose. If you have too many stars, you don't have a team.

Who are your favourites?
I'm not saying this just because you are from England, but one of my favourites are England. However, there is something special about this tournament. In past tournaments you could specify that there were favourites. This time all teams start with the same chances.

Which group is the strongest?
Ours, of course. With Turkey, this is a very strong and powerful group. It will be a surprise to see who comes out of it.

And the weakest?
The weakest group is the one in which England are playing. At the draw in December I was wishing and praying that we would be in that group because the group leaders came from our qualifying group: Germany. We wanted to be in with them.

Euro 96 was a dull tournament. Do you expect defensive football again?
Usually in this type of tournament, the tactics are based on not losing. Using the whole field will be important, how you distribute your players, and how you analyse the opposition. Each team will adjust to the opposition. In a tournament like this, the target is to win. Euro 96 was similar to the 1990 World Cup: it was quite boring and defensive. But as the Turkish side, we won't have the same attitude as in 1996.

Do you expect more violence at Euro 2000, specifically between Turkish and English fans?
This is something that is really disturbing us. It's something very important, that no one should disregard. Turkish teams have played in Europe in the last 40 years, we have played British teams before, and there were never unpleasant scenes. In 1996 England were the hosts and there were no scenes like these.

We have to think that in the last few games both sides have had some guilt. No cup, no tournament, is more important than a human life, especially when it concerns two nations that have always had sympathy for each other. I myself run a hotel near Izmir as a sideline, and in the last 10 years all my customers have been British. I have more affection for British people than the average Turk does.

The real cause of these unwanted scenes is alcohol. Games and events like these should bring nations together. We shouldn't sit down and debate which of us is guilty. We should try to learn to avoid these mistakes.

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Hitting form

Semb's men have enjoyed a rewarding warm-up campaign, says Sigurd Odegaard

WHEN national coach Nils Johan Semb started his preparations for Euro 2000 in the winter, his main concern was his key players' lack of first-team football. Since then, the problem has eased as Tore Andre Flo, Henning Berg, Kjetil Rekdal and Thomas Myhre have enjoyed regular football at club level.

This winter's results have also given Semb reason for optimism. The friendly matches played on foreign soil have been particularly positive, and even the defeat at home against Belgium in late April could be viewed as a necessity, to get everyone's feet firmly back on the ground. The dangers of this not happening became apparent two years ago when good results in friendly games prior to France 98 raised expectations so high that the team was not capable of fulfilling them.

"I accept that a defeat might be healthy for us now," said Semb following the Belgium game, "but on the other hand, I never think it is an advantage to lose a football match. And for my stomach it would certainly have been better if we had won!"

In February Norway took part in a tournament for the Scandinavian countries in La Manga, Spain. New players were given the chance to blossom and John Arne Riise and John Carew showed glimpses of their potential as future internationals. Riise, 19, has been a revelation for the French champions Monaco this season, while 20-year-old Carew's exploits for Rosenborg in the Champions League gave him the chance to sign for Valencia. He will join them after Euro 2000.

Another player who impressed in La Manga was goalkeeper Morten Bakke (Molde), who was Man of the Match in the draw against Sweden. He will certainly be challenging Frode Olsen and Thomas Myhre for the goalkeeper's jersey in the Low Countries.

After the games in Spain, Semb then chose to play two friendlies away, against Turkey and Switzerland. In Istanbul two of the side's England-based players – Henning Berg and Tore Andre Flo – showed great form during their team's convincing 2-0 win. Despite a lack of club football at the time, Berg marshalled central defence superbly, together with Bjorn Otto Bragstad (Rosenborg). Meanwhile, Flo showed his repertoire of skills up front, often taking on the Turkish defence on his own. He played Riise through to score his first goal for his country and also put in Roar Strand to score the second.

The tactics utilised during the Turkey game could well be employed again at Euro 2000 – a cautious approach with the emphasis on defensive solidity combined with quick counter-attacking moves.

Plenty of potential...John Carew (right)

Against Switzerland in late March Norway again showed that they are capable of scoring goals on foreign soil, but this time they were also conceded. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer had a good match in the 2-2 draw and goalkeeper Thomas Myhre was at his best, despite being out in the cold at Everton at the time.

'Even the defeat at home to Belgium could be seen as a necessity, to get everyone's feet back on the ground'

On the basis of the performances away expectations were high for the home match against Belgium. But this time the team was well below par and gave a lacklustre performance. Having been in command during the first half, the Norwegians let it all slip in the final 45 minutes allowing Belgium to score twice.

"Our poor performance can be explained by the lack of concentration," Semb explained after the game. "We certainly had respect for Belgium before the match started and my players went into it with the right attitude. As things went so smoothly in the first half, even though we didn't score, we approached the second half with a lack of concentration. We were very disappointing and probably played the worst football in my reign as national coach."

Kjetil Rekdal, who now plays for Valerenga in Norway, did not impress against Belgium, and left-back Andre Bergdolmo also seems to be under threat from Stig Inge Bjornebye, who is in good form for Brondby in Denmark.

One player who really has hit form this spring is Solskjaer. He looked as sharp as ever as he continued to score goals for Manchester Utd in the Premiership run-in. Against Belgium he was given the chance to play in his favourite position, as a striker, instead of on the flanks, and he showed he can do the business just as well as Tore Andre Flo.

Semb's greatest challenge in the weeks leading up to the tournament will have been to motivate the players to keep their form as their national leagues have come to a close. Some of them clearly showed symptoms of fatigue against Belgium.

Nevertheless, his players are well drilled in the system the team uses and if they are all on song come June/July they should be capable of qualifying from the group stage, along with Spain.

★ Star Man
Tore Andre Flo

TORE ANDRE FLO may lack the aggression of many strikers playing at the top level, but the Chelsea player, who will turn 27 just after Euro 2000 gets under way, has become the icon of the Norwegian national side.

Flo's standing rose greatly after he scored the equaliser against Brazil in the final group match at France 98. Norway went on to win and ensure qualification for the knockout stages. Arne Scheie, who was commentating on that match for NRK, remembers the evening well. "When Flo scored that first goal and Rekdal scored the winner after Flo had been fouled, I felt sheer joy and euphoria," he says. "We all realised how important Tore Andre was to our team. What impresses me most is his ability to turn and twist on a coin. For someone so tall, his technical skills and repertoire are amazing."

In Norway there has been much debate about the fact that some of our young footballers leave for foreign clubs too early. We have examples of players who have succeeded despite being very young – Steffen Iversen of Spurs and John Arne Riise (Monaco). Others have clearly been too young to cope with the tough world of international football. Flo, however, developed his skills with clubs at home, such as Sogndal, Tromso and Brann, before he was tempted to try his luck abroad. He was 24 when he signed for Chelsea in 1997 and was fully prepared for what awaited him.

Scheie pays credit to the system the Norwegian FA introduced some years ago for developing the skills that Flo now displays. "The FA saw the necessity of having coaches whose job it was simply to work on the individual skills of players. Harald Aabrekk, now assistant Norway coach, has done wonders with Flo. His qualities are unique and Flo owes him a lot."

Despite the fact that Flo has had more than one challenger for his position, he has made it his own. "He is such a talented striker that it would be a waste to use him in any other position," Scheie asserts. "Steffen Iversen and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer are also very good strikers, but in the 4-5-1 system Semb prefers, Flo is the natural striker whereas the others can play wide or in more withdrawn roles."

Life has certainly changed for Flo since he moved abroad and started to make a lot of money from his football. But, says Scheie, he is the same down-to-earth person. Flo comes from a family in which sport, and especially football, is the main interest. His older brother, Jostein, a former Norway player, has been a model for his sibling. Now it is Tore Andre whose performances for club and country are inspiring today's kids in Norway to go out and practise their skills.

Sigurd Odegaard

Attacking mainstay...Tore Andre Flo

NORWAY

How they line up

NILS JOHAN SEMB has stuck to the 4-5-1 system introduced so successfully by his predecessor Egil Olsen. The key elements are a zonal defence relying on a disciplined offside trap and a hard-working midfield that does not allow the opposition time and space on the ball.

Frode Olsen, who signed a three-year contract with relegated Spanish club Sevilla after a loan period, and **Thomas Myhre**, who joined Birmingham on loan from Everton, have both played for Norway during the build-up period. Myhre is perhaps the most reliable of the two, whereas Olsen can pull off amazing saves and deputised for Myhre in most qualifying matches.

In central defence **Henning Berg** and **Erik Hoftun** have been used in most matches, but Hoftun's partner at club level, **Bjorn Otto Bragstad**, has shown that he is well capable of playing at international level.

The full-backs are uncertain because of injuries and lack of form. **Andre Bergdolmo** has been a virtual ever-present at left-back but lack of consistency has brought **Stig Inge Bjornebye** into the frame. At right-back, **Vegard Heggem's** injury problems have given **Trond Andersen** a chance. Celtic's versatile **Vidar Riseth** can also fill this position.

It is of vital importance that the full-backs are willing to come forward and Semb has always preferred attacking players in these roles.

Kjetil Rekdal has played the role of anchor in central midfield for years but has some strong competition for that position from **Staale Solbakken** and **Bent Skammelsrud.**

The inside-forward positions in the system demand strong runners, and this is where Norway have an abundance of players: **Erik Mykland**, **Roar Strand**, **Steffen Iversen** and **Eirik Bakke**.

Strand has struggled with injury, while Mykland's bubbly character is an important ingredient to the side's make-up. And then there is the gifted **John Arne Riise,** fresh from helping Monaco to the French championship and challenging strongly for a starting place.

The pace of **Jan Derek Sorensen** and **John Carew** make them exciting options as wide men, but Semb might prefer more defensive-minded players.

> 'Norway's hard-working midfield will not allow their opponents time and space on the ball'

Up front, **Tore Andre Flo** has consolidated his position, despite the fact that **Ole Gunnar Solskjaer** has been scoring regularly for his club. Solskjaer is more likely to be used on the flank. A front line of Flo, Solskjaer and Iversen promises goals, and is a possibility given that the 4-5-1 system is easily converted into 4-3-3. In matches where Norway have most of the play, the wide players might be allowed to abandon their defensive duties and concentrate on attack. This will make the job of the central striker easier and give the team more options.

One player who might win a place in the squad simply because of superb club form is Brann striker **Thorstein Helstad**. His ability to take on players would be a valuable asset to the national team.

Squad pool

	Club	Age	Caps	Gls
GOALKEEPERS				
Morten BAKKE	Molde	31	1	0
Espen BAARDSEN	Tottenham (Eng)	22	4	0
Thomas MYHRE	Everton (Eng)/ Birmingham (Eng, loan)	26	8	0
Frode OLSEN	Sevilla (Spa)	32	13	0
DEFENDERS				
Trond ANDERSEN	Wimbledon (Eng)	25	7	0
Henning BERG	Manchester Utd (Eng)	30	69	8
Andre BERGDOLMO	Rosenborg	28	22	0
Stig Inge BJORNEBYE	Liverpool (Eng)/ Brondby (Den, loan)	30	70	1
Bjorn Otto BRAGSTAD	Rosenborg	29	9	0
Vegard HEGGEM	Liverpool (Eng)	24	16	1
Eric HOFTUN	Rosenborg	31	22	0
Mike KJOLO	Stabaek	28	1	0
MIDFIELDERS				
Eirik BAKKE	Leeds (Eng)	22	3	0
Orjan BERG	Rosenborg	31	19	1
Erik MYKLAND	Panathinaikos (Gre)	28	70	2
Kjetil REKDAL	Valerenga	31	82	17
John Arne RIISE	Monaco (Fra)	19	4	1
Vidar RISETH	Celtic (Sco)	28	23	2
Bent SKAMMELSRUD	Rosenborg	34	34	6
Staale SOLBAKKEN	AaB (Den)	32	56	9
Roar STRAND	Rosenborg	30	21	4
FORWARDS				
Ole-Martin ARST	Gent (Blg)	25	2	0
John CAREW	Rosenborg	20	11	2
Tore Andre FLO	Chelsea (Eng)	27	46	21
Thorstein HELSTAD	Brann Bergen	23	0	0
Steffen IVERSEN	Tottenham (Eng)	23	14	4
Andreas LUND	Wimbledon (Eng)	25	8	4
Ole Gunnar SOLSKJAER	Manchester Utd (Eng)	27	29	13
Jan Derek SORENSEN	Rosenborg	28	6	0

The view from Norway

Kjetil Rekdal
Norway captain
"The experience gained during the last two World Cups will be of vital importance for us. It is an enormous achievement by a small football country like Norway. This time the quarter-finals should be our aim, and if things go our way we will qualify from our group, alongside Spain."

Harald Aabrekk
Assistant national coach
"The fact that Norway used more players in qualifying than any other of the finalists was mainly due to the number of injuries we had. But also some of the players were not playing consistently for their clubs at the time. The positive side of it is that a number of players have gained international experience as a result and know the system well."

FOLLOW EURO 2000 24 HOURS A DAY

Arne Scheie
Senior football commentator, Norwegian Broadcasting (NRK)

"I believe Norway will do well and expect them to reach the quarter-finals. Victories against Slovenia and Yugoslavia and a draw against Spain should give the team an excellent position after the group stage.

"Norway's strongest asset is the team strength, and don't forget that they will benefit from the experience gained from the last two World Cups.

"Tore Andre Flo, Steffen Iversen and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer are excellent individual players, and Norway will rely on their attacking flair. The team has added new elements to their style of play under Nils Johan Semb."

For the record

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

GROUP 2		
06.09.98	Norway-Latvia	1-3
10.10.98	Slovenia-Norway	1-2
14.10.98	Norway-Albania	2-2
27.03.99	Greece-Norway	0-2
28.04.99	Georgia-Norway	1-4
30.05.99	Norway-Georgia	1-0
05.06.99	Albania-Norway	1-2
04.09.99	Norway-Greece	1-0
08.09.99	Norway-Slovenia	4-0
09.10.99	Latvia-Norway	1-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Norway*	10	8	1	1	21	9	25
Slovenia	10	5	2	3	12	14	17
Greece	10	4	3	3	13	8	15
Latvia	10	3	4	3	13	12	13
Albania	10	1	4	5	8	14	7
Georgia	10	1	2	7	8	18	5

**Norway qualified as group winners*

OTHER RESULTS SINCE SUMMER 1999

18.08.99	Norway-Lithuania (friendly)	1-0
14.11.99	Norway-Germany (friendly)	0-1
31.01.00	Norway-Iceland (Nordic Cup)	0-0
02.02.00	Norway-Denmark (Nordic Cup)	4-2
04.02.00	Norway-Sweden (Nordic Cup)	1-1
23.02.00	Turkey-Norway (friendly)	0-2
29.03.00	Switzerland-Norway (friendly)	2-2
26.04.00	Norway-Belgium (friendly)	0-2

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS RECORD

1960	1st round (no qualifying stage)
1964	1st round (no qualifying stage)
1968	Did not qualify
1972	Did not qualify
1976	Did not qualify
1980	Did not qualify
1984	Did not qualify
1988	Did not qualify
1992	Did not qualify
1996	Did not qualify

QUESTIONS TO THE COACH
Nils Johan Semb

What do you think of your group draw?
It is a tough one, especially as we start against Spain, who must be the overall tournament favourites, along with Holland. They are a very strong team.

The match against Yugoslavia will be the key one for us. If we are to reach the second round, we have to beat Yugoslavia. But they are a very good team, with players at top clubs in Italy and Spain, so it will be very tight.

Slovenia are the outsiders in the group, but they will be looking to take points off us and Yugoslavia. And they have played some good games recently, against France, for example.

So it's a difficult group, but all the groups are difficult. The European Championship is even more difficult than the World Cup, where there are weaker teams from Africa and Asia.

Who are your key players?
Our strength is the team, the collective. We need good players, of course, but we are a small country and do not have that many good players. We have to be well-organised and use men who can adapt their play.

Most of your team play abroad. Has that been a good or bad thing?
It's been very good for us. It's very important that our best players play in the big leagues, particularly the Premier League. Sometimes it can be a problem getting them released for friendlies and training camps. But for the qualifying matches it was no problem.

You mentioned Holland and Spain as favourites to win the tournament. Do you think any other teams can win?
France, who have improved a lot recently.

England-improved...Iversen

Will there be any surprise teams?
I think Belgium have improved a lot under their new coach. We played them recently and they looked very strong. Also playing all their matches at home in Brussels will be a big advantage.

What about surprise players?
Raul has impressed me a lot in the Champions League, although he is already a big star.

What is your coaching philosophy?
We have to be well organised. If you give more than one goal away in today's game, you lose. So it's vital that we're well organised, not just so we are able to defend, but also so we win possession so we can attack. Over the past couple of years, we have also been trying to vary our attacks, mixing the long pass with the short pass. We have been trying to make it more difficult for our opponents to know what we are planning.

Are you varying your attacks because your players have improved?
Yes, they are stronger than they were six or seven years ago. Their play has improved and that is down to them playing in the Premier League.

Why has Norwegian football made such rapid progress in recent years?
There are many reasons. Firstly, we now have a professional League and players can train twice a day. Secondly, a lot of players have gained great experience in the Premiership. Third, we have worked very hard in youth development. Players are being taught technical skills and are being developed much earlier. Fourth, Egil Olsen did a great job with the national team in the early 1990s, giving everyone a lot of confidence. Fifth, there is Rosenborg's progress in the Champions League.

How are your relations with the press?
Well, they expect a lot, maybe too much for a small country like ours with not that many good players. I try to understand that they have a job to do. Their job is also important.

What is your realistic target for the tournament?
This is the first time we have qualified for the championship, so a big target will be to get past the first round. If we qualify for the quarter-finals, I will be a very happy man.

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Unexpected and looking to surprise

Football fever has gripped one of Europe's smallest countries. Now they can't wait for the big day. Zdravko Reic reports

WHEN Slovenia met Ukraine in Kyiv in the Euro 2000 play-off second leg last year, the interest was such that the domestic TV viewing figures went through the roof.

The result, a 1-1 draw following a 2-1 win at home in the first leg, has ensured unprecedented interest in a game that tends to play second fiddle to skiing and other mountain sports.

Slovenia, which gained its independence in 1990, has won a place at a major international football tournament for the first time and right now everyone is crazy about the game.

A stream of reporters and TV crews have been visiting the capital, Ljubljana, in an attempt to explain how one of Europe's smallest countries, with a population of just two million and with almost no football tradition, is set to compete against the top nations at Euro 2000.

Slovenia's opening match, against Yugoslavia in Charleroi on June 13, will be a major media event not least because of the connections between the two countries. The Slovenia coach, Srecko Katanec, won 31 caps for Yugoslavia, and two of his current squad, Darko Milanic and Djoni Novak, also played for them before their own country won independence.

Slovenia has sold out its entire allocation of 15,500 tickets for the three group matches, and although there is a belief that the team will prove they are not there by accident, the reality is a little bit different. There are no bigger outsiders at Euro 2000 and even to gain a point from the group games would be something of a miracle. When you talk to the Slovenian players, it's clear that they feel their chances are pretty modest and that mission has been accomplished merely by making the final 16.

Nevertheless, Slovenians are a very defiant people. Katanec is a typical example. As a player

'As a player, Katanec showed tremendous fighting spirit – now he has instilled the same attitude in his team'

he showed a tremendous fighting spirit in his time with Stuttgart and Sampdoria. Now he has instilled the same attitude in his players. Yet for all that, no team at Euro 2000 is so dependent on one player as Slovenia are on Zlatko Zahovic. While Katanec can rely on the rest of his side to play collectively, he looks to Zahovic for the type of imagination

French lesson...Pavlovic holds off Vieira

that wins matches. Unfortunately, Zahovic has had a troubled season at Olympiakos and was suspended for two months at the end of the Greek season for verbally abusing the then coach, Alberto Bigon.

Zahovic is not the only one of Slovenia's leading players to be lacking first-team action. Novak (Sedan) and Miran Pavlin (Karlsruhe) were also left kicking their heels in the latter part of the season.

Despite these difficulties, Katanec expressed considerable optimism following his side's warm-up game against world champions France in Paris at the end of April. Slovenia went 2-0 ahead after eight minutes and eventually lost 3-2 only after conceding a goal in injury time.

"I like it better that we lost, so the big surprise will be saved for Euro 2000," said Katanec. "I'm really satisfied with the way we played, especially with our mental attitude."

A late inclusion to the Slovenia set-up is 22-year-old midfielder Tonci Zlogar, in superb form for HIT Gorica in the domestic League during the second half of the season. Zlogar apart, only six home-based players are likely to feature in Euro 2000 – Simeunovic, Galic, Karic and Vugdalic from Maribor Teatanic, Osterc from Olimpija, and third-choice keeper Nemec from Mura. Nastja Ceh from Maribor was also on the verge of making the party.

Objectively, Slovenia are not capable of reaching the second round. They are absolute outsiders, but they will be very dangerous to anyone who considers them as such.

Balancing act...Novak keeps Shevchenko at bay during the play-off against Ukraine

★ Star Man
Zlatko Zahovic

HOW FANS of Slovenia must wish that their national team's number one player, attacking midfielder Zlatko Zahovic, had never set foot in the camp of Greek side Olympiakos.

Zahovic, Slovenia's top scorer in the Euro 2000 qualifiers with 10 goals, has been at war with his Hellenic paymasters ever since arriving at Olympiakos from FC Porto in a £6.5million deal back in July and has seemed intent on penning an instruction manual on how not to prepare for an international tournament.

All in all, Zahovic, who when not cast as the rebel without a cause is an intelligent and exceptionally skilled playmaker-cum-finisher, has thrown away four months of valuable match practice.

Last autumn he went on strike for two months, justifying his action with claims that the Greek League was a third-rate affair staffed by "jealous, lazy and unprofessional" players.

But no sooner had he apologised and been reintegrated into the squad than he was pressing the self-destruct button once more.

Zahovic let rip with a volley of abuse at then coach Alberto Bigon after being substituted in a League game against Panathinaikos in March and was hit with a two-month ban by the Olympiakos board. His season was effectively over and Slovenia coach Srecko Katanec must be wondering what he has done to deserve the potentially disastrous consequences for his top performer.

Rumour has it that Zahovic never wanted to go to Olympiakos in the first place; that he only grudgingly agreed to go there when FC Porto refused to sanction a transfer to his first-choice destination, Valencia. But the Slovenian star insists his bad behaviour has other causes. "It's due to the great pressure I'm under at the moment," he says. "My problem is that I've not been able to come to terms with my new environment in Greece, the mentality at Olympiakos. I'm responsible for my actions. I accept I've acted in an improper manner and deserve my punishment."

But a move from his present club is clearly on the cards. "At Olympiakos I have run into a totally different understanding of business and professionalism. We have different opinions on every topic. I'm not saying they are wrong and I'm right, but the differences are too big."

There is little doubt that, come next season, Zahovic will be looking to have joined a side more suited to his thinking. Euro 2000 provides the perfect opportunity for him to sell himself to prospective buyers.

Nick Bidwell

Special offer...Zlatko Zahovic will be hoping to attract a buyer at Euro 2000

SLOVENIA

How they line up

NATIONAL COACH Srecko Katanec recently spent two weeks on holiday with his family in the Dominican Republic but no doubt he spent a good deal of the time planning his strategy for Euro 2000.

Katanec has already proved that he is a great tactician, and is helped by the fact that the team he inherited from Zdenko Verdenik, himself an expert in the use of systems, has played together for seven or eight years.

But the general plan for Slovenia is pretty clear: they line up in a 3-5-2 formation, with goalkeeper **Mladen Dabanovic** and the three centre-backs – **Darko Milanic**, **Marinko Galic** and **Aleksander Knavs** – presenting an uncompromising rearguard. Dabanovic is being pressed hard for the starting place by **Marko Simeunovic** but should win Katanec's vote despite his rival's greater experience.

Another stalwart, the 50-times capped **Ales Ceh**, performs the sweeper's role just in front of the back three. He rarely goes forward and when the side plays against stronger teams – as they will at Euro 2000 – the left-sided **Amir Karic** is also called upon to play a holding role. This allows **Djoni Novak**, on the right, to push up when the opportunity arises.

Defensive cover is provided by **Spasoje Bulajic**, **Zeljko Milinovic** and **Rudi Istenic**, who can also play in midfield.

The defence play as far up as they can, with their main outlet the controversial midfield star **Zlatko Zahovic**, who is given the freedom to roam wherever he wants.

The Olympiakos player has had a far from ideal preparation, having missed several weeks at the end of the Greek season after being banned for criticising his then club coach Alberto Bigon.

But despite his problems, Zahovic remains Slovenia's main source of inspiration. He relies on improvisation in attack, often linking with Novak, who performs the David Beckham role as chief supplier of crosses. Alternatively, Zahovic will move into the space created by the forwards to go directly for goal.

Miran Pavlin, who plays his club soccer in Germany with Karlsruhe, is a very disciplined midfielder who does a lot of defensive work but is also capable of making telling breaks, can unhinge a defence with his pinpoint long passes, and is an excellent reader of the game. **Sasa Gajser** is a ready-made replacement for Novak and **Mladen Rudonja** an option on the left, especially if Katanec needs to introduce some attacking verve.

> 'Katanec has already proved he is a great tactician – and inherited his team from an expert in the use of systems'

Hard-running **Zoran Pavlovic** has come into contention for a place in central midfield since becoming a regular at Dinamo Zagreb, as has **Tonci Zlogar**, of HIT Gorica.

Slovenia's main source of goals is 31-year-old **Saso Udovic**, of Austrians Linz ASK, who has scored 15 in 36 internationals. Expect him to be on the end of the knock-downs from partner **Milan Osterc**, a handful in the air for any defence.

Potential substitutes up front are the talented but sometimes wayward **Milenko Acimovic** and **Ermin Siljak**.

Squad

	Club	Age	Caps	Gls
GOALKEEPERS				
Mladen DABANOVIC	Lokeren (Blg)	28	11	0
Dejan NEMEC	Mura Murska Sobota	23	0	0
Marko SIMEUNOVIC	Maribor Teatanic	32	25	0
DEFENDERS				
Spasoje BULAJIC	Koln (Ger)	24	8	1
Marinko GALIC	Maribor Teatanic	30	49	0
Rudi ISTENIC	Uerdingen (Ger)	29	15	0
Amir KARIC	Maribor Teatanic	26	23	1
Aleksander KNAVS	FC Tirol (Aut)	24	20	1
Darko MILANIC	Sturm Graz (Aut)	32	39	0
Zeljko MILINOVIC	Linz ASK (Aut)	24	15	0
MIDFIELDERS				
Ales CEH	Grazer AK (Aut)	32	50	1
Sasa GAJSER	Gent (Blg)	26	4	1
Djoni NOVAK	Sedan (Fra)	30	47	3
Miran PAVLIN	Karlsruhe (Ger)	28	23	2
Zoran PAVLOVIC	Dinamo Zagreb (Cro)	23	3	0
Mladen RUDONJA	St Truiden (Blg)	28	36	0
Zlatko ZAHOVIC	Olympiakos (Gre)	29	45	21
Tonci ZLOGAR	HIT Gorica	22	1	0
FORWARDS				
Milenko ACIMOVIC	Red Star (Yug)	23	19	4
Milan OSTERC	Olimpija Ljubljana	24	19	5
Ermin SILJAK	Servette (Swi)	27	18	4
Saso UDOVIC	Linz ASK (Aut)	31	36	15

The view from Slovenia

Branko Oblak

Former player with Olimpija, Hajduk, Schalke and Bayern Munich; now coach of Rudar Velenje

"It's logical that Slovenia should be regarded as the side with the least chance of reaching the second round. Our team will play a pretty closed, defensive game, but we know how to attack, and may cause a surprise or two.

"We probably won't reach the second round, but will spoil the plans of some of the favourites. Take our first match, against Yugoslavia – they are never ready, they are always arrogant, and that makes them perfect for us. It has all the makings of a great battle."

Dr Zdenko Verdenik

Former Slovenia national coach

"We won't disappoint, our team will show they are not there by accident. I believe that we will get a positive result against Yugoslavia in the first match – not because of political motivation but because the Yugoslavs have a pretty unsettled situation in their country and in the team.

"Our major strength is that the team is

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homogeneous; it's practically the side that I used to train, but reinforced with some new, young and attractive players such as Zahovic.

"Because we are a new team on the European scene, lots of the other countries may subconsciously under-estimate us and that way of thinking will cost them dearly."

Branko Elsner

Slovenian coach and former Austrian national team manager

"We are in a tough group with Spain, Yugoslavia and Norway but you never know what will happen in football and I always try to look on the bright side.

"I'm encouraged by the self-confidence Katanec has managed to instil in his players. His uncompromising style makes me think that Slovenia can cause a major surprise. However, if we come home quickly we won't be unhappy because this tournament is an extraordinary chance to begin preparations for the 2002 World Cup."

For the record

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

GROUP 2		
06.09.98	Greece-Slovenia	2-2
10.10.98	Slovenia-Norway	1-2
14.10.98	Slovenia-Latvia	1-0
27.03.99	Georgia-Slovenia	1-1
05.06.99	Latvia-Slovenia	1-2
09.06.99	Albania-Slovenia	0-1
18.08.99	Slovenia-Albania	2-0
04.09.99	Slovenia-Georgia	2-1
08.09.99	Norway-Slovenia	4-0
09.10.99	Slovenia-Greece	0-3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Norway	10	8	1	1	21	9	25
Slovenia*	10	5	2	3	12	14	17
Greece	10	4	3	3	13	8	15
Latvia	10	3	4	3	13	12	13
Albania	10	1	4	5	8	14	7
Georgia	10	1	2	7	8	18	5

**Slovenia qualified for the play-offs as runners-up*

PLAY-OFFS

13.11.99	Slovenia-Ukraine	2-1
17.11.99	Ukraine-Slovenia	1-1

Slovenia 3-2 on agg. Qualified for finals

OTHER RESULTS SINCE SUMMER 1999

19.02.00	Slovenia-UAE (Muscat tnmt)	1-1
23.02.00	Oman-Slovenia (Muscat tnmt)	0-4
26.04.00	France-Slovenia (friendly)	3-2

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS RECORD

1992	Did not enter
1996	Did not qualify

QUESTIONS TO THE COACH
Srecko Katanec

Who are your favourites to win Euro 2000, and why?

Holland and Belgium have a great chance – simply because they are playing at home. Holland would be my favourites even if they were not at home. Then there is Spain. They have played together for a long time and have a winning mentality – that has been shown by the success of their clubs in the Champions League.

The Spanish have always been excellent in the qualifiers, then had a bad moment in a single match to crush their ambitions. I'm pretty sure that won't happen this time.

I wouldn't forget the French. They have six or seven players on the bench who won the World Cup, and that's a lot of quality. Traditional favourites like Germany and Italy don't look as good to me.

Who will be the star players?

There are too many to pick one or two. But if you insist, the stars should be Zidane and Raul if France or Spain reach the Final.

Who will be the surprises, and why? Who will be the most surprising youngsters?

I would love it if Slovenia happen to be the biggest surprise of the championship. The dark horses could be Turkey. Their potential is great, their enthusiasm even greater.

How do you rate your team's chances. What stage can they reach?

We achieved everything in the play-offs when we beat Ukraine. Now we want to be treated as equals. We may not be as good as Spain, Yugoslavia and Norway but anyone who under-estimates us will be surprised. I'm sure we'll give the fans something to enjoy.

Everything is dependent on the outcome of the first match. If we keep a clean sheet, we could even reach the second round. But we are under no pressure to do that.

How is your team preparation? Do you have enough time?

I try to get the best out of our preparations, that's why I'm always short on time – especially when some players have missed matches. Our trump card, Zahovic, has had problems at Olympiakos, Pavlin has not been playing at Karlsruhe, nor Novak at Sedan. Even Acimovic hasn't been a regular at Red Star. When I see their condition, I'll decide what to do.

What would you suggest to referees?

They should be balanced in their judgments. We talk about punishing fouls from behind, and protecting the best players. I absolutely support such protection. Let the class players enjoy privileges, but they should never become untouchables. I would ask referees to use the whistle for the good of football. Many whistle for the sake of it, and think that they are the most important person on the field.

Which will be, generally speaking, the tactical habits and the tactical novelties? Will it be offensive or defensive?

The first matches will be very tactical, because fear will rule, especially among the favourites. So the play will be pretty cautious.

How do you see each group at Euro 2000?

Group A is very complex, but I wouldn't be surprised if the Germans don't make it to the second round. They have lost their authority,

Italy are the favourites on paper in Group B but again I wouldn't be surprised if they fail.

In Group C, our group, Spain are the favourites while we have the least chance. But we will get some points. We can surprise Yugoslavia, who individually have stronger players, but do not know how to act as a unit. Norway lack players with imagination. If things aren't as they expected them to be, they fall apart.

Group D, with Holland, France, the Czech Republic and Denmark – now that's really roulette.

Do you think Holland and Belgium's joint organisation of the event will have more advantages or more disadvantages, and in which areas?

It is interesting to have two hosts; they will have the advantage of playing at home. That will be the greatest test for referees. I think you know what I mean.

Do you think hooliganism will create problems?

It is pretty clear that our hosts should be aware of it. Our supporters won't cause any problems because we are a well-educated nation. The problems are the ones who are not there for football, but for street fights. I believe that the police are well prepared, and I want them to be ruthless, for the good of true football fans.

INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL WEBSITE

Carry on, club fashion

Keir Radnedge says Spain have the talent to succeed – if they dare

THE CLOSER Spain get to the finals of the European Championship, the more nervous they become.

In the past they have become almost inured to the outcome – that great expectations will be blown away under pressure of the big occasion. But that excuse will not wash any more. The consensus among observers across Europe is that Spanish football is top of the pile after the progress of no fewer than three clubs – Real Madrid, Valencia and Barcelona – to the semi-finals of the Champions League. Now all that remains is for Spain's national team to win Euro 2000.

What has impressed outsiders all the more about the Spanish League this season is that the likes of Deportivo La Coruna, Zaragoza and Alaves have been up there with Real Madrid and Barcelona. That may appear to represent strength in depth.

In years gone by Spain's national team stood little comparison with the top clubs because they were packed with foreign stars and the national team lived off the scraps. Barça are still heavily reliant on imports, but while Real Madrid and Valencia also have a number of foreign stars, they have offered plenty of proof that home-grown talent still 'works' in the international club game.

That should spill over into a national team and squad which coach Jose Antonio Camacho has already infused with talent from just about every nook and cranny in the Spanish League.

Camacho has proved a feisty manager. He has stormed to the brink of resignation on several occasions over his right to choose the players he wanted regardless of club demands. But that is only the sort of loyalty to the colours which he expects of his players.

'Camacho has infused the squad with talent from just about every nook and cranny in the Spanish League'

Camacho also has proved far more positive in terms of tactics than Javier Clemente, his safety-first predecessor. Clemente had made Spain hard to beat but it sometimes appeared that he left the forwards to their own devices.

Not so Camacho. He has maintained the defensive solidity while constructing a far more user-friendly attacking set-up – and when a team has strikers of the talent of Raul, Fernando Morientes and Ismael Urzaiz that spells trouble for first-round rivals Norway, Slovenia and Yugoslavia.

On the attack...Fernando Morientes

Spain's high-scoring success in the qualifying competition earned them a place among the top seeds when the Euro 2000 draw was made. They won all their final seven qualifying matches in a run that included 9-0 home thrashings of Austria and San Marino and a 6-0 win away to the latter.

Raul, the Real Madrid forward who is probably Europe's most outstanding young player, scored hat-tricks at home to Austria and away to San Marino while Barcelona's Luis Enrique claimed a treble in the home destruction of San Marino.

It's a pity Luis Enrique will miss the finals through injury. His combative versatility could have proved important. Spain may also suffer in midfield from the effect on playmaker Pep Guardiola of Barcelona's erratic finish to the season.

Reflecting on events four years ago, Spain know they should have done better against the Euro 96 hosts in the quarter-finals at Wembley, when nerves and a poor referee got the better of them before they lost the penalty shoot-out. Somehow Clemente survived in the job for a few more months. This time round, there will be no such forgiveness for Camacho if Spain fall in the first round.

Brushed aside...Urzaiz (right) took part in the slaughter of Austria

★ Star Man
Raul

RAUL GONZALEZ is a rare talent in a European football world dominated by big-money transfers and the fall-out from the Bosman ruling. He is a home-grown kid who plays for his home-town club and invested his first big pay cheque in a new house for his parents.

Real Madrid's 22-year-old superstar has proved that loyalty still counts for something – along, of course, with the rewards of a new £12 million contract.

Raul is living proof that the post-Bosman open market in foreign players need not shut the door on local talent. He also is proof that clubs who scrap their nursery set-ups are hurting only themselves. As he says: "Every player has to start somewhere. If the clubs didn't worry about youth teams where would anyone get their players?"

Raul always excels against Atletico Madrid. It's revenge. He played for them as a kid until volatile president Jesus Gil scrapped the youth section to save a few pesetas. Raul switched allegiance to Real. All he wanted was to play football. He says: "I want to win the Champions League with Madrid and I want to win the European Championship with Spain."

In the spring of 1998 Raul celebrated his 100th appearance for Real. In the spring of this year he celebrated his 100th goal.

Real, even with all their debts, would turn up their aristocratic noses at offers of £20m for the young forward. Raul, however, remains very much the electrician's son from a working-class suburb of the Spanish capital. He says: "People always ask me about going to Italy, but I have always found it very hard to think of leaving Madrid. This is home. How could I play for anyone else?"

Raul may well find out one day – but not yet. The pressure on him to do that will build up if he inspires Spain in Euro 2000 as he failed to do at the last World Cup. He scored an astonishing 11 goals in qualifying for Euro 2000 as Spain recovered from the shock first game defeat against Cyprus to win Group 6 comfortably.

For such a slightly built but remarkably resilient footballer, Raul possesses hidden strength and a superb temperament. His former Real Madrid team-mate Emilio Butragueno was similar, his four goals against Denmark in the 1986 World Cup earning him instant legendary status. If Raul can peak at the right time, there is a growing confidence among Spaniards that he can emulate Butragueno this summer. Spain, European champions in 1964, have not won a senior tournament since. Raul will have plenty more opportunities but may never have a better one.

Keir Radnedge

Home-grown talent...Raul

SPAIN

How they line up

JOSE CAMACHO is not a coach given to delicate tactical sophistication. He likes 4-4-2, he likes his players to work hard and he likes them to use every inch of the pitch. Football is a team game to the one-time Real Madrid defender and no one need bother to bring a superstar ego to the table.

Even the goalkeeper has to watch his step – which is why Camacho has kept faith with **Jose Molina**, though whether he will survive the psychological fall-out from Atletico Madrid's relegation is another matter. **Santiago Canizares**, generally Camacho's No 2, could well start the finals in the job. It will also be interesting to see whether Camacho takes Real Madrid's brilliant teenager **Iker Casillas** to the finals, for the experience at least.

There are some interesting options for the four man defence, particularly considering the fact that Camacho probably thought this was one area in which he would need to waste comparatively little thinking time. **Michel Salgado** should virtually pick himself on the right after his excellent spring, while **Agustin Aranzabal** is the man in charge on the left. **Juan Velasco** is a former winger who provides an attacking alternative to Michel Salgado. Similarly, **Sergi** is the rival to Aranzabal on the left.

If, in the centre of defence, Camacho sticks with favourites then he will use Barcelona's reliable **Abelardo**, but whether **Fernando Hierro** or **Paco** plays alongside him is open to question. Hierro was perhaps Spain's best player at France 98 but injuries and time have taken their toll and he was not looking the same player this season.

Club problems may also weigh on Camacho's mind in midfield. **Josep Guardiola** would have been an automatic choice this time last year but the Camp Nou chaos, plus niggling fitness worries, have undermined his form. That could offer a wonderful opportunity for Valencia skipper **Gaizka Mendieta**. Club-mates **Farinos** and **Gerard** – the hat-trick hero against Lazio in the Champions League – might make it as well.

Juan Carlos Valeron might welcome the shop window opportunity offered by Euro 2000 after the Atletico Madrid disaster, while the finals would provide a terrific bonus to the season for Depor veteran **Fran** on the left. **Joseba Etxeberria** is the favourite to play on the right side of midfield.

> 'Camacho likes his players to work hard; no one need bring a superstar ego to the table'

Up front, outsiders would consider **Raul** and **Fernando Morientes** the obvious partnership, but not so Camacho.

Raul will certainly play, but Morientes is another matter. At his best he ranks among the best centre-forwards in Europe but his fitness has been questionable and his eagerness to return to action – perhaps provoked at Real Madrid by the brooding presence of Nicolas Anelka – has proved self-defeating. **Ismael Urzaiz** has proved a highly effective partner for Raul in Spain's colours and Camacho may well prefer to keep it that way.

Winger **Pedro Munitis** could provide attacking variety, while **Alfonso** is experienced if a little injury-prone.

Squad pool

	Club	Age	Caps	Gls
GOALKEEPERS				
Santiago CANIZARES	Valencia	30	22	0
Iker CASILLAS	Real Madrid	19	0	0
Jose MOLINA	Atletico Madrid	29	7	0
TONI	Atletico Madrid	29	3	0
DEFENDERS				
ABELARDO	Barcelona	30	43	3
Agustin ARANZABAL	Real Sociedad	27	16	0
Fernando HIERRO	Real Madrid	32	69	23
MICHEL SALGADO	Real Madrid	24	12	0
PACO Jemez	Zaragoza	30	12	0
ROMERO	La Coruna	28	1	0
SERGI Barjuan	Barcelona	28	44	1
Juan VELASCO	Celta Vigo	23	3	0
MIDFIELDERS				
Vicente ENGONGA	Mallorca	34	11	1
Joseba ETXEBERRIA	Athletic Bilbao	22	24	6
FARINOS	Valencia	22	0	0
FRAN	La Coruna	30	12	2
GERARD	Valencia	23	0	0
Josep GUARDIOLA	Barcelona	29	34	4
GUTI	Real Madrid	23	1	0
LUIS CEMBRANOS	Rayo Vallecano	28	1	0
Gaizka MENDIETA	Valencia	26	11	1
Juan Carlos VALERON	Atletico Madrid	25	9	0
XAVI	Barcelona	20	0	0
FORWARDS				
ALFONSO Perez	Betis Sevilla	27	32	9
Fernando MORIENTES	Real Madrid	24	12	9
Pedro MUNITIS	Racing Santander	24	8	1
RAUL Gonzalez	Real Madrid	22	31	16
Ismael URZAIZ	Athletic Bilbao	28	15	8

The view from Spain

Juan Pedro Martinez
Editor of Spanish football weekly Don Balon

"Spain have world-class players and a coach who's convinced them that talent means nothing without hard work. Camacho inherited a broken team and has built a disciplined unit. Unlike Clemente, he doesn't chop and change his side or try to reinvent football; Camacho's Spain have their own tactical style and will stick to it, regardless of the opposition. And gone are the days when the squad was dominated by Barça and Real Madrid cliques; Camacho picks the best players regardless of who they play for, and fields them in their natural positions.

"The fact that Valencia's midfield trio – Farinos, Gerard and Angulo – aren't in the team shows the depth of talent. And the vertebral column of Hierro, Guardiola and Raul – one of the few players in Europe who can win games on his own – is as good as anybody's."

FOLLOW EURO 2000 TEAM BY TEAM AT

Luis Martin
Spain correspondent for the daily Sport
"Camacho has built a team that mirrors what made him a legend as a player: a combination of ability and guts. He has created a great atmosphere off the pitch and a genuine team come matchdays; both are new for Spain. Camacho keeps people focused, too: if the Real Madrid and Valencia players are in a cloud after the Champions League Final he'll soon get their feet back on the ground.

"My only reservation is historical; Spain have always bottled it when it comes to the crunch. Germany are the masters of playing badly and getting to finals; we're the masters of playing brilliantly and losing in the quarter-finals. As we'll probably meet France or Holland at that stage, I'm afraid it could happen again. There is no lack of quality, though: Hierro, Abelardo, Guardiola and Raul are players for the big occasion and Etxeberria and Mendieta could make a big impact."

For the record

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

GROUP 6		
05.09.98	Cyprus-Spain	3-2
14.10.98	Israel-Spain	1-2
27.03.99	Spain-Austria	9-0
31.03.99	San Marino-Spain	0-6
05.06.99	Spain-San Marino	9-0
04.09.99	Austria-Spain	1-3
08.09.99	Spain-Cyprus	8-0
10.10.99	Spain-Israel	3-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain*	8	7	0	1	42	5	21
Israel	8	4	1	3	25	9	13
Austria	8	4	1	3	19	20	13
Cyprus	8	4	0	4	12	21	12
San Marino	8	0	0	8	1	44	0

**Spain qualified as group winners*

OTHER RESULTS SINCE SUMMER 1999

18.08.99	Poland-Spain (friendly)	1-2
13.11.99	Spain-Brazil (friendly)	0-0
17.11.99	Spain-Argentina (friendly)	0-2
26.01.00	Spain-Poland (friendly)	3-0
23.02.00	Croatia-Spain (friendly)	0-0
29.03.00	Spain-Italy (friendly)	2-0

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS RECORD

1960	Quarter-finalists
1964	Winners
1968	Quarter-finalists
1972	Did not qualify
1976	Quarter-finalists
1980	Group stage
1984	Finalists
1988	Group stage
1992	Did not qualify
1996	Quarter-finalists

QUESTIONS TO THE COACH
Jose Antonio Camacho

Who are your favourites to win Euro 2000?
It's impossible to say which are the strongest teams until the competition gets under way. If I'm not mistaken, both Denmark and the Czech Republic started as rank outsiders.

How do you see your group?
Most of the Norwegians and Yugoslavs play for clubs in Europe's top leagues and Slovenia are no pushovers. If we don't treat each rival with the utmost respect, we won't even make the quarter-finals.

Are you worried that everyone is talking about you as favourites?
We haven't played a game yet and people are talking about us meeting Holland or France in the quarter-finals. I'm one of life's optimists, but that's ridiculous. As long as the players don't start suffering from an excess of euphoria, we'll be fine. We still don't have any big tournament wins to shout about. We have to keep battling, giving everything. I would remind everyone that Spain aren't great achievers in international football. The favourites are teams with a track record. We have the potential to have a good tournament and we will fight all the way. But we mustn't exaggerate our possibilities.

Do you feel the pressure?
There will always be pressure on coaches. You will always be judged on your results and there will always be important challenges to face up to. I remember my first stint in sole charge of a club. When I went to Rayo Vallecano it was like the first day of exams. As coach of Spain, there's even more at stake. Expectations become more and more inflated every time Spain go to a World Cup or European Championship.

You have played some tough teams in warm-up matches. Why?
I wanted my players to be prepared for the kind of games they will play this summer. As far as I'm concerned, Spain don't play friendlies.

Are you worried about being too adventurous with your style of attacking football?
Of course when we play like this we leave open the possibility of being hit on the break by high-quality teams. But I was a player myself and I like to see football played like this.

Will this be Spain's year?
I believe in Spanish players. Up to now, they haven't always performed to their potential in international competition. It's high time this changed.

Great potential...Spain have the ability to go all the way

UEFA EURO 2000 Belgium - The Netherlands

Discord hampers preparations

Vladimir Novak on a troubled build-up for Boskov's side

WHEN national coach Vujadin Boskov stated that Yugoslavia were going to win Euro 2000 he may have merely been attempting to boost morale. Nevertheless, his players and the public alike are far more cautious when considering the team's prospects in the Low Countries.

The reasons are quite obvious. Firstly, there are the memories of France 98. On paper, Yugoslavia appeared to be one of the strongest teams going into the tournament and many expected them to reach the semi-finals at least. In reality, their performances turned out to be far from spectacular.

Secondly, there was the qualifying campaign for Euro 2000. While it's true that Yugoslavia booked their place at the finals by winning what was a fairly difficult group, the team's performances against their main opponents, Croatia and the Republic of Ireland, offered no sign that they had improved since the World Cup.

Pessimists even go so far as to claim that Euro 2000 will be the swansong of a worn-out generation that has played together virtually unchanged since December 1994. But even if such a prospect might prove unfounded, another reason for concern is that the confusion surrounding Boskov's pronouncements about some of his senior squad members could damage the spirit within the camp.

It is evident that the coach did his team no favours by stating publicly last autumn that captain Dragan Stojkovic and Dejan Savicevic were not in his plans for Euro 2000, and then insisting that Sinisa Mihajlovic would be the new skipper.

A bizarre situation then arose when the FA general secretary, Branko Bulatovic, denied that what the national coach had said was true, and stated that nothing had changed; Stojkovic would remain captain, Savicevic second choice and Predrag Mijatovic third.

'While Yugoslavia won their qualifying group, there was no sign that the team had improved since France 98'

Of course, Boskov, as national coach, has the right to have the final word in selecting the team, but for Stojkovic to learn via the internet that he had been sacked throws into doubt the instincts of such an experienced manager.

The disputes off the field have been potentially harmful to the national team's prospects, and the preparation programme has also left much to be desired. While Yugoslavia's group rivals, Spain, Norway and Slovenia, have had serious warm-up matches against the likes of Italy, Germany and France, Boskov's men were facing far less formidable opposition such as Macedonia and China.

The inability of the FA to set up games against stronger European nations stemmed from the bad political image of the country. And even when a suitable test was arranged – away to Turkey in late April – it was cancelled for dubious reasons (the Turks excused themselves because of the alleged heavy fixture schedule of their Galatasaray players).

As a result, the performances and results in the preparation games hardly give an insight into the strength of the Yugoslavs ahead of their first Euro 2000 encounter, on June 13 against Slovenia.

Yugoslavia put in a solid performance during the 2-1 win over Macedonia in Skopje at the end of February. Mijatovic scored both goals for his country and was on target again a month later when Bora Milutinovic's China were beaten 1-0 in Belgrade.

In place of the Turkey game, the Yugoslavs organised a match in Belgrade between the national side and a team selected by journalists (in fact, it was virtually a match between Yugoslavia A and Yugoslavia B), with the national team winning 7-1.

The final preparations started on May 18 in Belgrade, but with several players missing because of their club commitments in Italy and Spain.

Five days later, with the full squad together, the Yugoslavs were due to start a Far East tour with matches against China (May 25), South Korea (May 28 and 30) and a Hong Kong XI (June 3).

One can hardly imagine that the players were happy about the strenuous nature of the tour. Be that as it may, after the return on June 4, and two days off, there will be a couple of training sessions before the departure to Belgium on June 8. In their training camp in Edegem, near Antwerp, the Yugoslavs will make final preparations for their attempt to mount a successful Euro 2000 campaign.

Dragan Stojkovic, who in 1984, at the age of 19, played in his first European Championship finals, suggests adopting a cautious approach to this summer's tournament. "I would love if we could win the title," he says. "But let's go step by step, starting with the Slovenians."

Realistically, a place in the quarter-finals would appear to be the most Yugoslavia can expect. But there is at least the prospect that, if things start well, they can surpass the expectations that have been dampened by the events of the last two years.

Recent goals...Predrag Mijatovic scored in the friendlies against Macedonia and China

★ Star Man
Sinisa Mihajlovic

THE unthinkable prospect of Yugoslavia going to Euro 2000 without their best player, Sinisa Mihajlovic, appeared a distinct possibility when it was revealed in April that the Lazio defender had signed an application form for membership of Slobodan Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS).

The news was exploited by state TV and newspapers alike as a welcome advert for the president's regime. However, Mihajlovic was swift to deny the story. "I did not sign with the Socialist Party," he said from Rome on the day the news hit the headlines. "I signed some papers which I thought were applications for becoming a goodwill ambassador. To be honest, I didn't look thoroughly at all those papers. That form was planted on me.

"Afterwards I heard the news about my alleged SPS membership. I demand an urgent and official denial from Belgrade. Otherwise I won't play any longer with the Yugoslav national team."

The following day, after a phone conversation with the Lazio star, FA general secretary Branko Bulatovic told the press that Mihajlovic confirmed the denial, but that the threat about leaving the national team had been made in the heat of the moment and that he now stated that he would continue playing for Yugoslavia.

The public reaction towards Mihajlovic was, in general, unfavourable, with many suggesting that he knew what he was signing, and that he changed his mind following the media reaction in Italy.

Mihajlovic has been no stranger to controversy this year. In January he greeted a banner held aloft by Lazio hooligans which paid honour to the assassinated Serbian warlord Arkan. By contrast, Mihajlovic earned a lot of respect during the NATO bombing of his country last year. He was among the first Yugoslavian players based abroad who protested against the air-strikes and even had a meeting at the Italian ministry of foreign affairs.

On the pitch, Mihajlovic is undoubtedly his country's most influential player. He plays a crucial role in central defence, is renowned for his great free-kicks, and has the knack of producing his best performances in the biggest games. Take for example Yugoslavia's last Euro 2000 qualifier, against Croatia in Zagreb. Mihajlovic was expected to face the most extreme hostility from the home fans having been born, to a Serbian father and a Croatian mother, in the Croatian town of Vukovar. However, he not only stayed cool but also put in a flawless performance and created the goals that secured automatic qualification for his side.

The Yugoslavs simply cannot renounce such a player; even if he has developed a habit of becoming entangled in controversial situations.

Vladimir Novak

Shrouded in controversy...Sinisa Mihajlovic

YUGOSLAVIA

How they line up

YUGOSLAVIA arrive at Euro 2000 with practically the same personnel they had at France 98. Then they played with a 4-4-2 formation, and it is likely that coach Vujadin Boskov will stick to that in the Low Countries, as he did during the qualification campaign. It is true that he stated recently that he favours 3-5-2; nevertheless, a switch seems far from certain.

The goalkeeping position, where the Yugoslavs have a great tradition, is now one of the team's biggest problems, with Boskov's number one, **Ivica Kralj**, currently only number three at his club, PSV. Possible replacements are not convincing. **Zeljko Cicovic** will be number two, with either **Aleksandar Kocic** or **Milorad Korac** the third choice.

The zonal back four includes the key figures of central defenders **Sinisa Mihajlovic** and **Miroslav Djukic**. **Nenad Sakic** seems to be Boskov's first choice as the replacement for suspended right-back Zoran Mirkovic. Sakic is a very robust player and difficult to beat in one-on-one situations; however, his value as an attacking full-back remains to be seen. **Ivan Dudic** could also come into contention for the right-back role.

Goran Djorovic is one of the most reliable players of this generation, but it is clear that the left-back slot is not his ideal position. At club level, he has played well in central defence for some years, and did so at France 98 (because Djukic was injured). This is the reason that Boskov may consider using 3-5-2, ideally with Djukic, libero Mihajlovic and Djorovic as a back three. In that instance **Jovan Stankovic** could play as left wing-back.

Other candidates in defence are **Slobodan Komljenovic**, who can fill in anywhere, **Nisa Saveljic**, **Mladen Krstajic**, **Drazen Bolic** and perhaps also Red Star captain **Goran Bunjevcevic**, currently one of the best footballers in Yugoslavia.

In midfield only two players are sure of a starting place – **Slavisa Jokanovic**, in front of the defence, and **Dejan Stankovic**, in central midfield. In normal circumstances **Dragan Stojkovic** should take the playmaker role, but Boskov may prefer to use him as a sub. Many feel that Stojkovic must play quite simply because Yugoslavia haven't got a better playmaker, even if he can last only an hour or so.

The fourth man in midfield should be **Vladimir Jugovic** if he can recover from an injury-hit spring.

> 'Yugoslavia are well known for their passing game and are strong on the counter-attack'

There is a fairly wide choice of midfielders capable of filling in for Stojkovic and Jugovic. These include **Ljubinko Drulovic**, **Albert Nadj**, **Nenad Grozdic**, **Dejan Govedarica**, **Predrag Djordjevic** and newcomer **Nikola Lazetic**. But the debate over Dejan Savicevic's potential role became academic when he pulled out of the squad after suffering a thigh injury in a game for his club side, Rapid Wien.

In attack the only concern is the fitness of **Predrag Mijatovic**. But even if he is ruled out, Boskov still has **Darko Kovacevic**, **Savo Milosevic** and Partizan's rising star, **Mateja Kezman**, to call on.

Yugoslavia are well-known for their passing game and are strong on the counter-attack, though Mihajlovic is over-fond of sending long passes out of defence, bypassing the midfield. But his speciality, free-kicks, are one of the team's most potent weapons.

Squad pool

	Club	Age	Caps	Gls
GOALKEEPERS				
Zeljko CICOVIC	Las Palmas (Spa)	29	2	0
Aleksandar KOCIC	Red Star Belgrade	31	16	0
Milorad KORAC	Obilic Belgrade	31	0	0
Ivica KRALJ	PSV Eindhoven (Hol)	27	31	0
DEFENDERS				
Drazen BOLIC	Salernitana (Ita)	28	7	0
Goran BUNJEVCEVIC	Red Star Belgrade	27	2	0
Goran DJOROVIC	Celta Vigo (Spa)	28	40	0
Miroslav DJUKIC	Valencia (Spa)	34	36	1
Ivan DUDIC	Red Star Belgrade	23	0	0
Slobodan KOMLJENOVIC	Kaiserslautern (Ger)	29	17	2
Mladen KRSTAJIC	Partizan Belgrade	26	4	0
Sinisa MIHAJLOVIC	Lazio (Ita)	31	43	5
Nenad SAKIC	Sampdoria (Ita)	29	3	0
Nisa SAVELJIC	Bordeaux (Fra)	30	26	1
Risto VIDAKOVIC	Betis Sevilla (Spa)	30	8	0
MIDFIELDERS				
Predrag DJORDJEVIC	Olympiakos (Gre)	27	4	0
Ljubinko DRULOVIC	FC Porto (Por)	31	25	2
Dejan GOVEDARICA	RKC Waalwijk (Hol)	30	16	1
Nenad GROZDIC	Vitesse Arnhem (Hol)	26	8	0
Sasa ILIC	Partizan Belgrade	22	0	0
Slavisa JOKANOVIC	La Coruna (Spa)	31	49	8
Vladimir JUGOVIC	Internazionale (Ita)	30	33	3
Nikola LAZETIC	Obilic Belgrade	22	1	0
Albert NADJ	Oviedo (Spa)	25	27	3
Dejan STANKOVIC	Lazio (Ita)	21	17	6
Jovan STANKOVIC	Mallorca (Spa)	29	6	0
Dragan STOJKOVIC	Grampus Eight (Jap)	35	75	15
Djordje TOMIC	Partizan Belgrade	27	1	0
FORWARDS				
Mateja KEZMAN	Partizan Belgrade	21	0	0
Darko KOVACEVIC	Juventus (Ita)	26	34	4
Predrag MIJATOVIC	Fiorentina (Ita)	31	46	22
Savo MILOSEVIC	Zaragoza (Spa)	26	44	20
Perica OGNJENOVIC	Real Madrid (Spa)	23	6	0

The view from Yugoslavia

Dobrivoje Jankovic
Football writer, Politika daily newspaper, Belgrade
"After the World Cup it looked as if the Yugoslav national team would be rejuvenated, because the tournament showed that the top players had passed their peak. But there have been almost no changes. I'm afraid that the chances of reaching the quarter-finals are very slight."

Radisav Gvozdenovic
Football commentator, Belgrade
"I'm concerned about the atmosphere in the camp. The debate about who shall be captain was completely unnecessary.

"There is also the handicap that two of our key players – Jugovic and Mijatovic – are injured. Moreover, I think

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that the goalkeeper question has not been solved."

Milojko Pantic
Football commentator, TV Belgrade
"I agree with Boskov's opinion that our main target must be reaching the Final and, if possible, winning the title. Why? Because Croatia came third at France 98 using players who were mainly substitutes at their clubs. They arrived in France fresh and eager to prove themselves. I think our team is now in a similar position."

Dragan Pantelic
Former goalkeeper with Radnicki Nis, Bordeaux and Yugoslavia; today, director at Radnicki Nis
"In my opinion the national team should have been rejuvenated. I fear that Boskov's team won't be fresh and powerful enough for such a tough tournament."

For the record

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

GROUP 8		
18.11.98	Yugoslavia-Republic of Ireland	1-0
10.02.99	Malta-Yugoslavia	0-3
08.06.99	Yugoslavia-Malta	4-1
18.08.99	Yugoslavia-Croatia	0-0
01.09.99	Republic of Ireland-Yugoslavia	2-1
05.09.99	Yugoslavia-Macedonia	3-1
08.09.99	Macedonia-Yugoslavia	2-4
09.10.99	Croatia-Yugoslavia	2-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Yugoslavia*	8	5	2	1	18	8	17
Rep of Ireland	8	5	1	2	14	6	16
Croatia	8	4	3	1	13	9	15
Macedonia	8	2	2	4	13	14	8
Malta	8	0	0	8	6	27	0

**Yugoslavia qualified as group winners*

OTHER RESULTS SINCE SUMMER 1999

23.02.00	Macedonia-Yugoslavia (friendly)	1-2
28.03.00	Yugoslavia-China (friendly)	1-0
26.04.00	Yugoslavia-Yugoslavia League XI (friendly)	7-1

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS RECORD

1960	Finalists
1964	2nd round (no qualifying stage)
1968	Finalists
1972	Quarter-finalists
1976	4th place
1980	Did not qualify
1984	Group stage
1988	Did not qualify
1992	Did not play**
1996	Did not enter

***Qualified for finals but were banned from competing by UEFA because of United Nations sanctions*

QUESTIONS TO THE COACH
Vujadin Boskov

Who are your favourites to win Euro 2000?
I think Holland, with a very strong team indeed and as a co-host country, have the best chance to take the title.

Who will be the stars of the tournament?
Football has become much more of a collective game in which individuality has to some degree been sacrificed. Therefore, today we haven't got such dominant figures like Pele or Cruyff.

Who are your key players?
Goalkeeper Ivica Kralj, central defender Sinisa Mihajlovic, central midfielder Slavisa Jokanovic and, in attack, Darko Kovacevic, who for me is currently perhaps the best striker in Europe.

What do you think of your group draw?
Slovenia is a little country but they have good players. They wouldn't have eliminated a strong Ukrainian side if they did not. As for Norway, in the past they never had footballers of great class, but as the game has changed, and thanks to having many players based in England, they have improved a lot. Nevertheless, I believe that Spain and ourselves are the strongest teams in our group.

Big talent...Dejan Stankovic

Will there be any surprise teams or players to watch out for?
Sweden, possibly. As for players, I believe that Dejan Stankovic is one of the biggest talents in Europe. Euro 2000 should be a great opportunity for him to prove he is an outstanding footballer.

What is your coaching philosophy?
That a coach must determine that each player he has at his disposal must play in a position appropriate to his abilities and corresponds to the position in which he plays at his club.

You still have a dilemma about whether to play 4-4-2 or 3-5-2, don't you?
If we find satisfactory solutions for the wing-back positions, we'll play 3-5-2.

Will you have enough time to prepare for the tournament?
I believe so. Once the whole squad is together, we have four matches in Asia, after which the players will get two days off. We then have two days' training in Belgrade before we leave for Belgium, where we will have five days before our first Euro 2000 game.

How are your relations with the press ?
They are always correct and good. The only thing that bothers me sometimes is that some journalists don't respect your time and your professional duties.

You accepted the job as national coach at an inconvenient time, in the middle of the qualifying campaign, three weeks before the home game against Croatia. Many say that it was a brave decision; and that, given your age [then 68] and great reputation, you were in a situation where you could lose more than win. Did you hesitate before accepting?
No, I did not. I stick to the Serb proverb 'If you can help, do it.' I didn't hesitate because I figured it would have been a pity not to pass on my experience to the Yugoslav players and not to try to bring satisfaction, a sort of present, to our people.

You said Yugoslavia's objective at Euro 2000 must be to reach the semi-finals at least. Isn't that aim rather optimistic?
My optimism is based on the fact that we have quality footballers who play for the strongest clubs in Europe. Also I feel that our players now have more self-confidence than before France 98.

Many Yugoslav fans find it odd that their national coach lives in Italy and attends domestic games so seldom. How do you select new home-based players if you don't watch them?
It's true I'm not often in Yugoslavia. But until recently there weren't direct flights to Belgrade [due to EU sanctions]. Now I can fly to Belgrade, I certainly intend to come to Yugoslavia more frequently.

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Great expectations

...but Chovanec's squad will need the rub of the green, says Bob Vaughan

SLAVS hold the view that people living by the sea are not sound in the head, but this has not prevented the Czech FA from deciding on the Pavillion du Zoute, near Knokke on the Belgian coast, for their headquarters during Euro 2000.

It is conveniently close to the Dutch border and not so far from the first venue, Amsterdam, where Jozef Chovanec's side take on co-hosts Holland in their opening match of the tournament.

The Czech Republic, who did not drop a point in the preliminary competition, could hardly have drawn more difficult opponents to start the tournament, and the game may well put into context the real strength of the successors to Dusan Uhrin's 1996 runners-up.

That unexpected second placing, the triumphant run through qualifying Group 9 and the fact that the Czechs have lost only one of their series of friendlies this season (3-2 away to the Republic of Ireland) have led to dangerously over-optimistic expectations among fans about the team's prospects in the Low Countries.

It is reasonable to say that Chovanec has a better and more experienced squad than Uhrin had in England, including two players, in Patrik Berger and Pavel Nedved, who are now world class. Unfortunately, Berger is suspended for the Holland game and the clash with the French five days later in Bruges. By the time they face Denmark in Liege on June 21, they may well need a win to qualify for the quarter-finals.

A cautious start against Bergkamp and Co is a certainty; no team likes to lose on a first outing in such a tournament, and a point would rank as a success. But whether the Czechs can muster such a performance has to be open to question. The euphoria over the 100 per cent record in qualification led both press and public to forget that eight of the 10 victories were gained against 'minnows', and the Faroes all but snatched a goalless draw in Torshaven in the Czechs' first game.

'Euphoria over a 100 per cent qualifying record led people to forget that eight wins came against minnows'

While no one can quibble about 26 goals for and five against in 10 ties, only the victories against Scotland could be considered good-quality European wins. Even then the Scots threw away a two-goal advantage in Prague, whatever you may say about the feats of Jan Koller and his 13 goals in 13 games for his country.

The friendly against Holland in Eindhoven last November was a better test for Chovanec's side, and they passed it by securing a 1-1 draw. However, it could well be a different story when the countries meet again on June 11.

The coach must have his worries about the central defence, where problems have arisen because of an injury to Jan Suchoparek. There was no obvious replacement, and Chovanec even toyed with recalling veteran Drnovice stopper Miro Kadlec.

Now Sparta's Jiri Novotny, an experienced international and fine footballer but not one able to impose himself physically, seems the likely choice.

Chovanec, however, is in no doubt about the variations his squad offer him in all departments. "This is a fantastic generation of players," he says. "We have men coming in and challenging for places who are really up to the job and can cope with the stress of top competition."

He points to the non-stop running and creativity of Nedved, the opportunism of Koller, who has been taking chances at Anderlecht as he was never able to with Sparta in the Czech League, and to the speed and technique of Berger, honed by his stay at Liverpool.

The coach's 3-5-2 formation, based on sound defence, looks promising. But the side seldom have been under pressure in the last 18 months. Several of the players, however, were under pressure in the qualifying competition for France 98, a tournament for which the Czechs failed to qualify. One of them, Pavel Kuka, probably bound for a sub's role in this tournament, could not crack it then. Pessimists who remember the ties with the Yugoslavs might say it could happen like that again.

The more pressure the defence comes under, the fewer the chances for Koller and his partner up front. And even with Nedved in charge in midfield, the Czechs may well need the rub of the green, as they had in England, to put themselves in contention for a quarter-final place.

The most they can realistically expect is a couple of points from the first two games and three against the Danes – but do not bet on it!

Ouch...Smicer and Co suffered their only defeat this season against Ireland

★ Star Man
Pavel Nedved

IN THE Czech Republic, national team midfielder Pavel Nedved is known as 'The Cannon' because of his powerful shooting, and it is a safe bet that he will be armed and ready for Euro 2000.

Whether used on the left flank or in a more central position, Nedved is an all-rounder of the highest order, with bags of energy, workrate, passing ability and feisty competitiveness. But above all, it is his flair for decisive goals that makes him special.

"I would like to think I am the sort of player who is at his best in pressure games," declares the 27-year-old, who is in his fourth season with newly-crowned Italian champions Lazio after moving to Rome from Sparta Prague.

"I have great memories of my goal in our victory against Italy at Euro 96 and scoring the winner when Lazio beat Mallorca in the Cup-winners Cup Final last year.

"I also remember scoring a last-minute goal to help Sparta Prague beat Slavia Prague a few seasons ago [1994-95]; it was a victory that put us on course for the Czech title.

"As a professional it is my duty to be as consistent as I can in every match I play. But obviously, it is the big occasions that really get the adrenalin flowing.

"There will be no need for any special motivation at Euro 2000. I can't wait for the tournament to begin and hope to play a leading role."

Nedved certainly has every reason to feel good about himself at the moment.

He was a key player as Lazio unexpectedly overhauled Juventus in the last lap of this season's Serie A race and he thinks there are parallels to be drawn between his club and the Czech side.

"Lazio proved what can be achieved if you never give in, if you always believe in yourself, " says Nedved.

"I believe that the Czech Republic has the same spirit. Look at our qualifier at home to Scotland. We were 2-0 down with less than 30 minutes left, but we had the character to battle back to win 3-2.

"I don't think we Czechs get the respect we deserve. We're second in the FIFA rankings, but still most people are assuming that Holland and France will be the two to qualify from our Euro 2000 group.

"Yes, we're in a very tough group. But don't write us off – we have a good chance of making the knockout stages too."

Nick Bidwell

Flair for goals...Pavel Nedved

CZECH REPUBLIC

How they line up

COACH Jozef Chovanec is likely to persevere with the tactics that proved so successful during the qualifying campaign, when he played four, or sometimes five, in midfield, two forwards and three at the back. Should the defence need support, one of the midfielders is liable to drop back to help out.

In goal, **Pavel Srnicek** seems likely to be the first-choice keeper, despite having played behind a poor defence and suffered relegation this season with his club side, Sheffield Wednesday. The number two spot should go to **Ladislav Maier**, who established himself at Rapid Wien this term, ahead of Slavia Prague's **Radek Cerny**.

Earlier in the season it looked as though Tomas Postulka and veteran Petr Kouba would be fighting it out to be Srnicek's deputy, but the former has lost his place at Czech champions Sparta Prague and Kouba was not a regular for Spanish League winners Deportivo La Coruna.

The absence through injury of libero Jan Suchoparek means that places are up for grabs in the back three, although the veteran Miroslav Kadlec did not make the final preliminary squad despite being recalled for the friendly against Israel in April.

Jiri Novotny seems well-placed to take over from Suchoparek, even though **Karel Rada** has been touted as a long-term successor. Instead, Rada may play as one of the flanking central defenders, along with **Tomas Repka**. New Kaiserslautern recruit **Petr Gabriel** is another option, along with Sparta Prague's **Milan Fukal**.

In midfield, the experienced **Radek Bejbl** and **Jiri Nemec** cover a lot of ground protecting the defenders and providing the base for counter-attacks from the classy midfield trio of **Pavel Nedved**, **Karel Poborsky** and **Patrik Berger**.

Radoslav Latal and **Miroslav Baranek** can fill in in the midfield holding roles if needed, but Baranek may be needed further forward, especially as Berger will be suspended for the first two matches of the tournament as punishment for his red card against the Faroe Islands in the final qualifier.

Up front, the towering **Jan Koller** is the first-choice striker, with the equally tall **Vratislav Lokvenc** his most obvious replacement from the substitutes' bench, and **Vladimir Smicer** the second striker. **Pavel Kuka** has appeared only intermittently for Stuttgart this season, so is most likely to only see action coming off the bench.

> 'Against Holland in the opening game of such a difficult group, caution is likely to be the watchword'

Against Holland in the opening game of such a difficult group, caution is likely to be the watchword for Chovanec, especially as he will be without Berger. So the coach may have to suppress his attacking instincts and opt to play just one striker. Smicer could then drop back into midfield.

In place of Berger for the first two games, Chovanec could go with Baranek, **Tomas Rosicky** or **Pavel Horvath**. Horvath is more of a playmaker and could come in for Nedved at some stage.

Pavel Verbir and **Rene Wagner** are the other options in attack, but they are unlikely to see much action.

Squad pool

	Club	Age	Caps	Gls
GOALKEEPERS				
Jaromir BLAZEK	Sparta Prague	27	0	0
Radek CERNY	Slavia Prague	26	1	0
Ladislav MAIER	Rapid Wien (Aut)	34	6	0
Pavel SRNICEK	Sheffield Wed (Eng)	32	30	0
DEFENDERS				
Milan FUKAL	Sparta Prague	25	3	1
Petr GABRIEL	Kaiserslautern (Ger)	27	7	1
Jiri NOVOTNY	Sparta Prague	30	24	2
Karel RADA	Slavia Prague	28	33	4
Tomas REPKA	Fiorentina (Ita)	26	35	1
Petr VLCEK	Slavia Prague	26	15	0
MIDFIELDERS				
Radek BEJBL	Atletico Madrid (Spa)	27	46	3
Patrik BERGER	Liverpool (Eng)	26	38	17
Pavel HORVATH	Slavia Prague	25	9	0
Radoslav LATAL	Schalke (Ger)	30	53	3
Pavel NEDVED	Lazio (Ita)	27	42	9
Jiri NEMEC	Schalke (Ger)	34	78	1
Karel POBORSKY	Benfica (Por)	28	54	2
Tomas ROSICKY	Sparta Prague	19	3	0
Ivo ULICH	Slavia Prague	25	8	1
FORWARDS				
Miroslav BARANEK	Sparta Prague	26	12	2
Jan KOLLER	Anderlecht (Big)	27	13	13
Pavel KUKA	Stuttgart (Ger)	31	78	25
Vratislav LOKVENC	Kaiserslautern (Ger)	26	27	3
Vladimir SMICER	Liverpool (Eng)	27	40	16
Pavel VERBIR	Teplice	27	9	2
Rene WAGNER	Rapid Wien (Aut)	27	10	3

The view from Czech Rep

Zdenek Nehoda
European Championship winner with Czechoslovakia in 1976

"The Czech side has a lot going for it. Chovanec is a good coach, the team are well-organised and know how to fight, and I appreciate the play of Berger, Nedved, Repka and Koller. But they must face sides of the quality of Holland, France and Denmark and we shall have to perform very well indeed to make the quarter-finals."

HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE CRUCIAL ISSUES

Tower of strength...Jan Koller

For the record

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

GROUP 9		
06.09.98	Faroe Islands-Czech Republic	0-1
10.10.98	Bosnia-Herzegovina-Czech Republic	1-3
14.10.98	Czech Republic-Estonia	4-1
27.03.99	Czech Republic-Lithuania	2-0
31.03.99	Scotland-Czech Republic	1-2
05.06.99	Estonia-Czech Republic	0-2
09.06.99	Czech Republic-Scotland	3-2
04.09.99	Lithuania-Czech Republic	0-4
08.09.99	Czech Republic-Bosnia-Herzegovina	3-0
09.10.99	Czech Republic-Faroe Islands	2-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Czech Rep*	10	10	0	0	26	5	30
Scotland	10	5	3	2	15	10	18
Bosnia-Herz.	10	3	2	5	14	17	11
Lithuania	10	3	2	5	8	16	11
Estonia	10	3	2	5	15	17	11
Faroe Islands	10	0	3	7	4	17	3

**Czech Republic qualified as group winners*

OTHER RESULTS SINCE SUMMER 1999

18.08.99	Czech Rep-Switzerland (friendly)	3-0
13.11.99	Holland-Czech Rep (friendly)	1-1
05.02.00	Hong Kong XI-Czech Rep (Carlsberg Cup) (*Czech Rep 4-3 on pens*)	2-2
08.02.00	Czech Rep-Mexico (Carlsberg Cup Final)	2-1
23.02.00	Rep Ireland-Czech Rep (friendly)	3-2
29.03.00	Czech Rep-Australia (friendly)	3-1
26.04.00	Czech Rep-Israel (friendly)	4-1

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS RECORD

(1960-1992 as Czechoslovakia)

1960	3rd place
1964	1st round (no qualifying stage)
1968	Did not qualify
1972	Did not qualify
1976	Winners
1980	3rd place
1984	Did not qualify
1988	Did not qualify
1992	Did not qualify
1996	Runners-up

QUESTIONS TO THE COACH
Jozef Chovanec

The Czech Republic have been drawn in Group D with France, Holland and Denmark. How do you feel about that?
I agree with the opinion that it is a well-balanced and very difficult group. Holland are co-hosts and have a very strong team, France are world champions, and Denmark proved their qualities at the last World Cup.

Who are your favourites to win Euro 2000?
It's hard to say, I could name all 16 countries. But if you pushed me, I'd say Spain or Portugal could be a big surprise.

Who will be the star players of the tournament?
That's a very difficult question to answer. All the teams have many players who could be a star player of the tournament. It will depend on the form of the players and also on the performance of the team. An individual cannot do much without the support of the team; conversely, the team needs some individual talents.

Missing...Jan Suchoparek

Who are your key players?
I am very glad that I can work with such an extraordinary generation of footballers. I can call upon players who have found success with some of the most famous clubs in Europe; I have players from the domestic League who want to assert themselves like their colleagues who play in foreign leagues; above all, I have the players who are ready to subordinate their knowledge and qualities to the needs of the team.

Will there be any surprise teams or players to watch out for at Euro 2000?
One team causes a surprise at every tournament. The Czech Republic were a big surprise at Euro 1996. At Euro 2000 one team will be designated the 'dark horses', for example Turkey.

What is your coaching philosophy?
I had the luck to be able to observe, as a player, the work of very good coaches such as Vaclav Jezek and Bobby Robson. It taught me a lot and of course I try to use the knowledge that I gained during my career. Every coach has his targets, and he has to meet them.

Will you have enough time to prepare for the tournament?
In the present football calendar everything is fixed and there are not so many free periods. The same conditions apply for all coaches. Our opponents in the warm-up games were chosen with our preparation in mind.

How are your relations with the press?
I think our relationship is proper.

Is Suchoparek's absence through injury a big loss?
I am very afraid of players suffering injuries before the tournament. Jan Suchoparek has a knee injury and we hope that he will be fit as soon as possible.

Lots of Czech players play abroad. Is this good or bad for the national team?
I appreciate very much the fact that our players have the opportunity to play abroad. They mostly play at famous clubs where they win valuable experience which they can use in the national team.

What is a realistic target for you at Euro 2000? Can you win the tournament?
We want to show our fans that we are able to play modern football. The tournament has a very high standard and each team could be successful. Like all the countries, we would like to get to the knockout stage, and then anything is possible.

Is football better or worse now than 25 years ago, and why?
Comparisons like that cannot be made. Each period in history has its great teams, its great players. They are determined by the conditions that prevail at the time, the development of technical equipment, the development of knowledge of the human body, by the opportunities to observe opponents in action, which is important for the development of tactics.

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UEFA EURO 2000

Down but not out

The Danes' spirit may yet see them qualify from the Group of Granite, writes Jim Holden

Foot in...Jesper Gronkjaer takes possession in the April friendly against Sweden

DENMARK'S preparation for the Euro 2000 tournament, at least on the face of it, looks a complete shambles, with the national team having lost all five of their matches since securing qualification for the finals by beating Israel in the play-offs last November.

Admittedly, the Danish squad that lost all three of their games, to Sweden, Norway and Finland, at the Nordic winter event in La Manga in Spain, was reliant almost exclusively on players based in the domestic Superliga. However, their opponents faced the same restrictions.

Two subsequent friendlies also ended in defeat, 2-1 away to Portugal, after the Danes took the lead through Jon Dahl Tomasson, and 1-0 at home to Sweden in perhaps the direst of all 96 encounters between the Scandinavian rivals.

No one could recall such an awful fixture. Even the crowd was only 28,000 in the 44,000-capacity Parken stadium for an encounter that is normally a guaranteed sell-out. But perhaps that relative lack of interest indicates how much, or rather how little, we should deduce from these warm-up internationals. The coaches view them as experimental only, and most of the players perform with the avoidance of injury as a factor in the back of their minds.

Denmark's Swedish coach, Bo Johansson, would rather play matches than not on international dates, but he set little store by the two results against Portugal and Sweden.

"They gave me a chance to look at certain players, that is the important thing," he explained.

Two years ago Denmark were beaten in all three friendly matches prior to the 1998 World Cup finals, yet when the real thing began they played some imaginative football, reaching a quarter-final against Brazil that was lost only narrowly, 3-2.

And who can forget the heady days in 1992, when the players were away on beach holidays when the country suddenly had a call to play in the European Championship finals as replacements for Yugoslavia? They arrived with hardly any practice, yet improved steadily during the tournament to end up shock winners of the trophy.

So the Danish fans are accustomed to shrugging off the kind of poor displays that cause media frenzies in larger nations like Germany, England and Italy. There is a common sense perspective that comes with being a small nation. Nevertheless, there is little optimism about Euro 2000, largely because Denmark have been drawn in by far the toughest group, alongside world champions France, co-hosts Holland and the highly-rated Czech Republic, a nation they have never beaten. Compare the four squads man for man and the Danes appear to come off worst in almost every position bar goalkeeper.

It is surely instructive to hear Johansson openly complaining about the unfairness of a system that

'Danish fans are used to shrugging off the kind of poor displays that cause media frenzies in larger nations'

allowed what they call the 'Group of Granite' to come to pass. A cynic would certainly see it as preparing excuses in advance, although my feeling is that Johansson is just expressing a typically honest personal viewpoint.

Yet while Peter Schmeichel is in the Denmark goal there is genuine hope for the side. The No 1 keeper, now playing his club football with Sporting Lisbon, remains a formidable sight for any opposing striker, and his immense experience, including 120 international caps, will earn him enduring respect.

The game plan for Denmark has to be brilliance from Schmeichel between the sticks, quick raids on the counter-attack by tricky wingers Martin Jorgensen and Jesper Gronkjaer, and the poaching of just enough goals by Ebbe Sand and the in-form Jon Dahl Tomasson to pinch good results. There are no other potential match-winners in the squad.

A surprise victory against the Czechs and a draw against either of the other teams might just be enough to secure qualification for the quarter-finals – where almost any opponents ought to be easier.

It's a long shot, admittedly, but a quick study of the history of the European Championship should be enough to deter anyone from being complacent about Denmark's potential. Advancing beyond the group stage is far from out of the question, and as coach Johansson proved in the last World Cup, he knows how to foster the team spirit so necessary for tournament football.

★ Star Man
Martin Jorgensen

MARTIN JORGENSEN will this summer become the most expensive player in the history of Danish football when he makes an £11million move from Udinese to one of the many big European clubs who have been assessing his development during the past two years.

Real Madrid, Milan and Juventus lead the pack for the signature of this skilful player, who is versatile enough to perform on the wing, across midfield, or tucked in the hole behind two strikers.

Jorgensen weighs in with his share of goals as well, but it is the 24-year-old's ability to beat opponents with slalom dribbling manoeuvres that really excites fans and potential buyers.

The Udinese man has undoubtedly become the key outfield player for Denmark. He provides the creative inspiration that had been the preserve for years of the Laudrup brothers. When injury forced Jorgensen to miss the recent clash against Sweden, the lack of flair in the team was acutely noticeable.

His football developed in typically Danish style. He joined the local IF Midtjurs club at just four years old, learning skills and technique long before playing in organised, competitive matches.

Jorgensen's talent was quickly evident and when still a teenager moved to Superliga club AGF Aarhus, whom he helped to win the Danish Cup in 1996. Promotion to the national team was not immediate, however. In fact, he played a record 31 matches for the Danish Under-21s.

Jorgensen was still only 21 and uncapped at senior level when Udinese swooped for him in the summer of 1997, a move that has proved highly astute. His international debut for Denmark finally arrived in March 1998, against Scotland, just a few months before the World Cup that summer.

The midfielder has never been out of the side since, barring the occasional injury, and performed with distinction as the Danes reached the quarter-finals in France, where they lost narrowly to Brazil.

He scored in the second minute of that game to confirm his relish of the big stage. Now a vital career move awaits. Jorgensen says he would prefer to remain in Italy where his life is settled, but admits that no player would say no to a realistic offer from Real Madrid.

An issue that could be vital in determining his next club is the position offered to him. "I'd like to play more in central midfield," says Jorgensen, who has increasingly been used in that role by Udinese. "You are more involved in that position. I also have to consider the kind of squad I am joining and how much I would play if there is a lot of rotation."

Another impressive set of displays in a major tournament for the young Dane would do his high ambitions no harm.

Source of inspiration...Martin Jorgensen

DENMARK

How they line up

THE MAIN problem for Denmark remains the composition of central midfield. Coach Bo Johansson has tried a number of permutations but still isn't sure of his best pairing. His dilemma is accentuated by the fact that the two central midfielders play a crucial role in stabilising the side and allowing the strategy of using wingers on both flanks to succeed.

Since the international retirement of the Laudrups, the creative elements of the team are wingers **Martin Jorgensen** and **Jesper Gronkjaer**.

"We play a basic 4-4-2 in defence and switch to 4-2-4 when we attack," says Johansson. "It gives us flexibility, which I like in a team. We can also go 4-3-3 or 4-5-1 if we want to. But the two central midfielders is a basic idea we try to stick to.

"Yes, I have tried a lot of different players. We have six, eight or 10 who can fill the role at the same level. That's very good for a coach to know. You want options. They are nice problems."

Johansson's positive attitude, though, is an attempt to make the best of a bad job in this regard. He may have 10 alternatives but none of them is currently international class. In the warm-up match against Sweden at the end of April he used bruiser **Stig Tofting** and veteran **Brian Steen Nielsen** in central midfield, bringing on the rapidly developing **Martin Laursen** as a second-half substitute for the former for only his second cap.

Laursen, 22, has had a superb season with Verona, prompting Johansson to say: "He is the kind of player you hope can come through into a big tournament, who shows you that thinking about a squad should be kept open until the last minute."

Allan Nielsen is also back in the reckoning after a loan move to Wolves from Tottenham has given him regular first-team football in the last two months. It would be no surprise if he and Laursen were eventual first choices for central midfield when Euro 2000 starts. Johansson has a reputation for caution, but placing faith in the Verona youngster may be a gamble he has to take.

Goalscoring is the other continuing worry for the Danes. **Jon Dahl Tomasson** has hit a rich vein – six goals in eight games – in the past 12 months, playing alongside **Ebbe Sand**. But there is little back-up behind. **Mikkel Beck** and **Peter Moller** recently returned to Denmark to boost their chances of a squad place, while **Miklos Molnar's** move to Kansas City Wizards is hardly inspiring.

> 'The two central midfielders play a crucial role in allowing the strategy of using wingers on both flanks to succeed'

The most vital player in the side is, of course, captain and goalkeeper **Peter Schmeichel**. If he is on top form he should allow Denmark to stay competitive even in matches where they may be second best to the opposition. The 36-year-old has benefited from his move to Sporting Lisbon, where there is less stress and strain than at Old Trafford.

In front of Schmeichel, who has **Thomas Sorensen** in reserve, Denmark's steady, experienced defence picks itself. **Thomas Helveg** is right-back, with **Jan Heintze** on the left. **Jes Hogh** and **Rene Henriksen** are well-matched in the centre. **Soren Colding** provides cover at right-back.

Injuries are a worry for Johansson because while the first-choice Danish team is sound enough, there is little strength in depth if key players are ruled out.

Squad pool

	Club	Age	Caps	Gls
GOALKEEPERS				
Peter KJAER	Silkeborg	34	2	0
Peter SCHMEICHEL	Sporting Lisbon (Por)	36	120	0
Thomas SORENSEN	Sunderland (Eng)	24	1	0
DEFENDERS				
Soren COLDING	Brondby	27	25	0
Jan HEINTZE	PSV Eindhoven (Hol)	36	61	2
Thomas HELVEG	Milan (Ita)	28	50	2
Michael HEMMINGSEN	OB	32	3	0
Rene HENRIKSEN	Panathinaikos (Gre)	30	16	0
Jes HOGH	Chelsea (Eng)	34	57	1
Allan OLESEN	AB	26	2	0
MIDFIELDERS				
Kim DAUGAARD	Brondby	25	2	0
Per FRANDSEN	Blackburn (Eng)	30	19	0
Bjarne GOLDBAEK	Fulham (Eng)	31	22	0
Thomas GRAVESEN	Hamburg (Ger)	24	5	0
Claus JENSEN	Bolton (Eng)	23	1	0
Martin LAURSEN	Verona (Ita)	22	2	0
Allan NIELSEN	Tottenham (Eng)	29	32	7
Michael SCHJONBERG	Kaiserslautern (Ger)	33	40	3
Brian STEEN NIELSEN	AB	31	52	2
Stig TOFTING	Duisburg (Ger)	30	18	2
FORWARDS				
Soren ANDERSEN	OB	30	15	1
Mikkel BECK	Derby (Eng)/AaB (loan)	27	17	3
Soren FREDERIKSEN	AaB	28	6	1
Carsten FREDGAARD	Sunderland (Eng)	24	4	0
Jesper GRONKJAER	Ajax Amsterdam (Hol)	23	8	0
Martin JORGENSEN	Udinese (Ita)	24	23	3
Peter MOLLER	Oviedo (Spa)/ Brondby (loan)	28	20	4
Miklos MOLNAR	Kansas City W (USA)	30	16	2
Dennis ROMMEDAHL	PSV Eindhoven (Hol)	21	0	0
Ebbe SAND	Schalke (Ger)	27	23	5
Jon Dahl TOMASSON	Feyenoord (Hol)	23	17	7

The view from Denmark

Age Hareide
Brondby coach
"I think Norway and Sweden might do well at Euro 2000. I'm not so sure about Denmark."

Benny Johansen
Silkeborg coach
"I believe home-based players in the Superliga will flower in international football if they are given the opportunity. That would be a good idea for Euro 2000."

Hans Christian Blem
Football writer, Ekstra Bladet
"No one in Denmark expects anything from Denmark this time round. It is a very difficult group with three tough teams to face. There is nothing to lose for the Danes, and if they come through the group it might then be possible to repeat Sweden 1992. The first

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game is vital. A draw against France might give some hope."

Jes Hogh
Denmark and Chelsea defender
"Before France 98 we lost every warm-up match. But it didn't matter at all. It's in the tournament that your form has to be right."

Lars Olsen
Euro 92-winning captain
"I really believe Denmark have a chance of qualifying from the group stage even though it is the toughest section. There is a strong possibility that France and Holland will under-estimate our side. That may even be the case with the Czech Republic."

For the record

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

GROUP 1		
05.09.98	Belarus-Denmark	0-0
10.10.98	Denmark-Wales	1-2
14.10.98	Switzerland-Denmark	1-1
27.03.99	Denmark-Italy	1-2
05.06.99	Denmark-Belarus	1-0
09.06.99	Wales-Denmark	0-2
04.09.99	Denmark-Switzerland	2-1
08.09.99	Italy-Denmark	2-3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Italy	8	4	3	1	13	5	15
Denmark*	8	4	2	2	11	8	14
Switzerland	8	4	2	2	9	5	14
Wales	8	3	0	5	7	16	9
Belarus	8	0	3	5	4	10	3

**Denmark qualified for the play-offs as runners-up*

PLAY-OFFS

13.11.99	Israel-Denmark	0-5
17.11.99	Denmark-Israel	3-0

Denmark 8-0 on agg. Qualified for finals

OTHER RESULTS SINCE SUMMER 1999

18.08.99	Denmark-Holland (friendly)	0-0
10.10.99	Denmark-Iran (friendly)	0-0
31.01.00	Denmark-Sweden (Nordic Cup)	0-1
02.02.00	Denmark-Norway (Nordic Cup)	2-4
04.02.00	Denmark-Finland (Nordic Cup)	1-2
29.03.00	Portugal-Denmark (friendly)	2-1
26.04.00	Denmark-Sweden (friendly)	0-1

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS RECORD

1960	1st round (no qualifying stage)
1964	4th place
1968	Did not qualify
1972	Did not qualify
1976	Did not qualify
1980	Did not qualify
1984	Semi-finalists
1988	Group stage
1992	Winners
1996	Group stage

QUESTIONS TO THE COACH
Bo Johansson

Who are your favourites to win Euro 2000?
I believe it is quite an open tournament. It might be easier just to name the four or five teams who cannot win than which country is favourite. Holland must be fancied with home advantage, and France are the reigning world champions. I also like the look of Spain, especially seeing how their clubs have dominated the Champions League with quite a few Spanish players in their teams.

You can never think badly of Italy and England in a tournament, and I am amazed that people want to write off Germany. Their history in tournament football makes that foolish.

Who will be the stars of Euro 2000?
It is difficult to say. The star tends to be the most important player of the team that wins. I have a suspicion about Zidane again [after France 98], or maybe Patrick Kluivert or Dennis Bergkamp of Holland. But that is not said with great confidence.

Proven...Schmeichel

Who are your key players?
I always answer that by saying any of the squad could be the key player, and that all the players are key men. But, of course, I also have to say that some players have proved over time that they are always very important to your team. They have proved they are stars. For Denmark that means Peter Schmeichel. The only problem is that he cannot score our goals – although he thinks he can!

What do you think of your group?
It is very difficult, the hardest of the tournament. That is because France, the world champions, were not seeded, and then we picked out the home nation, Holland, as well. To have them in the same group is wrong in my view. How can the world champions not be seeded? On top of that we have the Czech Republic, who were losing finalists at Euro 96. And Denmark were champions in 1992.

Will there be any surprise teams or players at Euro 2000?
If there is a surprise it will be the Czechs. Even though they reached the Final in '96 and have a wonderful record over the last two years, they are still not accepted by the experts as a top-class team. But they have some world-class players, like Pavel Nedved and Jan Koller. He is a superb forward, one of the best in the world.

What is your coaching philosophy?
The team is the most important thing. In different cultures and countries a coach may approach the question of teamwork in different ways, but without a sense of team in football you will not win many matches. I like to give players responsibility for their play within the framework of the team's tactics. That is important too. But while you want strong personalities and players with charisma, that must not be to the detriment of the team as a whole.

Will you have enough time to prepare for the tournament?
Yes, I am sure we do. Most of the players come together on May 22, and then we will work until the tournament, with a few days' rest spread over the period.

In the friendlies we have played so far there has been too little time, players only arriving on a Monday for a Wednesday match. That's not enough, and that helps to explain some disappointing results.

How are your relations with the media?
I think they are fine. I understand the newspaper writers have a job to do and a product to sell. I don't say too much that helps to sell papers, I don't speak in headlines. Maybe that's why they think I am a bit boring. But I don't mind that. A coach is judged on results, not on how many papers he helps to sell.

What will you do after Euro 2000 is over?
A good question. I have already announced that I will step down as Denmark's coach after the tournament, but I have also decided not to think about the future until this job is finished. Perhaps I will take another coaching role, but there is nothing definite at the moment.

OF FOOTBALL ON THE INTERNET

Twin strikers give the lead

The Henry-Trezeguet combination could be a potent force, writes Andre Duclos

THE opening phases of France's recent game against unfancied Slovenia at Stade de France seemed laden with doom for the team and their coach, Roger Lemerre, so often criticised since he took over from the victorious Aime Jacquet following the World Cup triumph in 1998.

Lemerre's side tottered in the opening stages, giving away two goals ineptly, but the team rallied and replied three times. The winning goal, in the final moments, went to David Trezeguet, his second of the game. This was especially significant because neither he nor his erstwhile Monaco team-mate, Thierry Henry, had quite cut the mustard in the last World Cup.

At the start of the following season, both youngsters were intransigent. Their enraged club president, Jean-Louis Campora, accused them of playing to get away and swore neither of them would be allowed to leave.

Henry, of course, was eventually allowed to go. He did not settle down or maybe did not get the chance to settle down with Juventus, but has exploded this season, not as a winger, but a centre-forward with Arsenal, under the tender loving care of former Monaco coach Arsene Wenger. He was unhappy with the way Lemerre used Henry for half the game against Slovenia, when he aggravated a hamstring injury which kept him out of action briefly on his return to Highbury. But his dynamic form in the second half of the season means that at long last France have found the centre-forward they so notably lacked during the World Cup finals. They may even have found two, Trezeguet at long last finding his best form.

'France have at long last found the centre-forward they notably lacked during the World Cup finals'

Christophe Dugarry, substituted against Slovenia, is unlikely to be considered as a starter in Euro 2000. For all his abilities he has never quite cracked it at international level. But a Henry-Trezeguet combination could be potent in Euro 2000.

The defence is not wholly reassuring, though that glorious veteran Laurent Blanc, coming to the rescue yet again with one of his goals against Slovenia, is still an elegant and dominating player.

What of Marcel Desailly? For all his great gifts, his skill, strength and positional flair, his huge experience, you do at times have to wonder. At Chelsea he has sometimes looked imperious, yet what of the way Henry brushed him off the ball at Highbury to score in their recent League meeting, and the uneasy times he had in the European Cup in Berlin, Barcelona and at home to Feyenoord?

Frank Leboeuf, somewhat fortunate to take Blanc's place and thus win a World Cup medal in 1998, has had a still shakier season than Desailly with Chelsea. He is prone to moments of strange unreliability, both in the air, where so big a man should dominate, and on the ground, where he often has been vulnerable. Nor has his disciplinary record in England been anything like ideal.

Zinedine Zidane, though, continues to be one of the most versatile, creative and incisive midfield players in the world. Both with his club, Juventus, and country, he has maintained his lofty standard. But his former Juve team-mate Didier Deschamps is another Chelsea player who has had a disappointing time. He began well enough but as the season wore on and his influence declined, perhaps with his stamina, you began to see why Juventus were prepared to get rid of him.

This is not an unmitigated blow to France and Lemerre, who has still to gain the full support of players, press and public alike, though he can console himself with the thought that Jacquet was under media fire for the bulk of his regime.

Where Lemerre scores, though, and where perhaps he may even have the edge over the somewhat unforgiving Jacquet, is that he can pardon players who have publicly criticised him – for the good of the cause.

The lively young Monaco midfielder Ludovic Giuly has been a beneficiary of this indulgence. Overlooking his public outbursts, Lemerre has called him up and all may well benefit accordingly.

There are no worries at all about those resilient, adventurous full-backs, Lilian Thuram and Bixente Lizarazu, though we can hardly hope for a couple more goals from Thuram, such as he scored in that France 98 semi-final against Croatia.

And how can we forget the eternal *enfant terrible*, Nicolas Anelka, who can win any match, on his day, with his speed and skill?

Back to his best...Zinedine Zidane

★ Star Man
Lilian Thuram

LILIAN THURAM cannot understand what all the fuss is about. He shrugs his shoulders and insists that the French will do their best at Euro 2000, but will not be condemned if they fail.

He says: "No one is obliged to win, but you are obliged to do all you can – to do your best. Only in Italy do players feel afraid of being condemned for not winning. In France, we don't live solely for football as Italians do.

"People know that we could win or lose just as easily but that the important thing is to give your all and to keep trying to win right to the very end."

With coach Roger Lemerre still undecided about his first-choice strikers, defence could be the best form of attack for the French. And Thuram, considered by many to be the world's best defender, is crucial to their hopes of success in Holland and Belgium.

The Parma man was arguably his country's best player when France won the World Cup on home soil two years ago, his two goals against Croatia securing their place in the Final.

For the French, the World Cup triumph was celebrated as a triumph of multiculturism. Nobody reflected the mood more than Thuram, who was born in Guadeloupe and moved to Paris as a nine-year-old.

His intellectual manner off the pitch – spectacles and a brief flirtation with the priesthood as a teenager – hides a steely determination to succeed on it.

Another exceptional season for Parma resulted in a contract extension until 2005, and reported interest from Manchester United.

But Thuram is a private man who professes not to be interested in financial matters.

"Now that you have clubs quoted on stock markets, it's going to create even more pressures. But I suppose that's not so unusual, given that the clubs invest so much. That makes them feel they have the right to demand results, both in sporting and financial terms.

"We players know that football is really that thing that you do out on the pitch. We don't have to get dragged into the goings-on behind the scenes at our clubs."

When asked to pick a winner for Euro 2000, Thuram has no hesitation.

"Holland," he says. "They're playing well and they'll be at home. But we're all at about the same level when we compete in this type of event, although I feel that England are under par, Germany are in something of a crisis and Italy aren't playing too well."

Dominique Antognoni

No pressure...Lilian Thuram

FRANCE

How they line up

FRANCE have produced their most effective football under coach Roger Lemerre thanks to a 4-5-1 formation, with **Nicolas Anelka** as the lone striker. Now that the latter has rediscovered his goalscoring touch at Real Madrid following his injury and disciplinary travails, he could force his way back into the team.

If Anelka does not make the recovery, Lemerre will surely plump for Arsenal's in-form **Thierry Henry** to be the solo front-runner. If, however, the coach does go for a 4-4-2 formation, the two attacking berths appear still very much up for grabs.

Anelka and Henry are both pacy and consummate finishers, but are arguably too similar in style to play together. Henry and **David Trezeguet** formed a good partnership up front for Monaco, **Youri Djorkaeff** can play in attack, but perhaps the best bet is either Henry or Anelka allied to the mobility and battling qualities of **Christophe Dugarry**.

Sylvain Wiltord is likely to be a forward-line joker, thrown on only in an emergency.

Whether or not France use a four or five-man midfield, Lemerre will play two tried and trusted midfield holders in front of the defence: **Emmanuel Petit** and **Didier Deschamps**. The latter has not been in the best of form this season for Chelsea and in normal circumstances would be under much more pressure for his place from **Patrick Vieira**. But Deschamps is in the privileged position of being France's captain.

In a 4-5-1 set-up, midfield general **Zinedine Zidane** is the all-important figure. He should be flanked on the right by Djorkaeff and on the left by either the versatile Dugarry, **Robert Pires** or **Johan Micoud**.

It may be that Micoud's candidacy wins out and he starts against Denmark on June 11. Dugarry is better in attack, Pires has not particularly sparkled this past term for a struggling Marseille, and Lemerre has made no secret of his admiration for the cultured scheming of Micoud.

A four-man midfield should be made up of Petit, Deschamps, Djorkaeff and Zidane.

The French rearguard is immutable. Despite **Fabien Barthez**'s recent problems at Monaco – he threatened to quit the club after coach Claude Puel accused him of throwing a game against Marseille, though the pair have since called a truce – he seems certain to start in goal.

> 'In a 4-5-1 formation, midfield general Zinedine Zidane is the all-important figure for the French'

Usually allergic to life on the bench, **Bernard Lama** has swallowed his pride and will provide cover between the posts, with **Ulrich Rame** the third-choice keeper.

France's back four is the same as that which was so solid at the last World Cup: **Lilian Thuram** and **Bixente Lizarazu** at right-back and left-back respectively; **Marcel Desailly** at stopper; and **Laurent Blanc** as sweeper.

Left-back **Vincent Candela** and central defender **Frank Leboeuf** remain in back-up mode.

Christian Karembeu, despite not playing regularly for Real Madrid, can provide cover in a number of defensive and midfield positions.

Squad

	Club	Age	Caps	Gls
GOALKEEPERS				
Fabien BARTHEZ	Monaco	28	31	0
Bernard LAMA	Paris Saint-Germain	37	41	0
Ulrich RAME	Bordeaux	27	2	0
DEFENDERS				
Laurent BLANC	Internazionale (Ita)	34	88	15
Vincent CANDELA	Roma (Ita)	26	19	1
Marcel DESAILLY	Chelsea (Eng)	31	63	2
Christian KAREMBEU	Real Madrid (Spa)	29	42	1
Frank LEBOEUF	Chelsea (Eng)	32	26	3
Bixente LIZARAZU	Bayern Munich (Ger)	30	52	2
Lilian THURAM	Parma (Ita)	28	54	2
MIDFIELDERS				
Didier DESCHAMPS	Chelsea (Eng)	31	92	4
Youri DJORKAEFF	Kaiserslautern (Ger)	32	60	22
Johan MICOUD	Parma (Ita)	26	4	0
Emmanuel PETIT	Arsenal (Eng)	29	35	3
Robert PIRES	Marseille	27	33	4
Patrick VIEIRA	Arsenal (Eng)	23	21	0
Zinedine ZIDANE	Juventus (Ita)	27	51	13
FORWARDS				
Nicolas ANELKA	Real Madrid (Spa)	21	9	3
Christophe DUGARRY	Bordeaux	28	37	5
Thierry HENRY	Arsenal (Eng)	22	13	4
David TREZEGUET	Monaco	22	16	5
Sylvain WILTORD	Bordeaux	26	10	3

The view from France

Maxime Bossis
European Championship winner in 1984
"It will be a very hard task for France to follow up their World Cup win with the European title. When you are world champions, everyone is out to knock you down. On the other hand, I don't see one outstanding team in Europe at the moment and France do have a number of exceptional players, not least Zidane."

Remi Guidicelli
France 3 television
"Without chauvinism, France must be among the favourites. They seem to be strong in every department. Zidane remains a class apart as the creative genius. Thierry Henry has developed into a super goalscorer at Arsenal and could be the last piece of the jigsaw."

Just Fontaine
Former French international centre-forward
"Before the World Cup I was very critical of coach Aime Jacquet. But look what happened. Maybe I should be pessimistic again and we'll win at Euro 2000. Seriously, though, we have a strong, well-balanced team and they have the potential to be semi-finalists at least."

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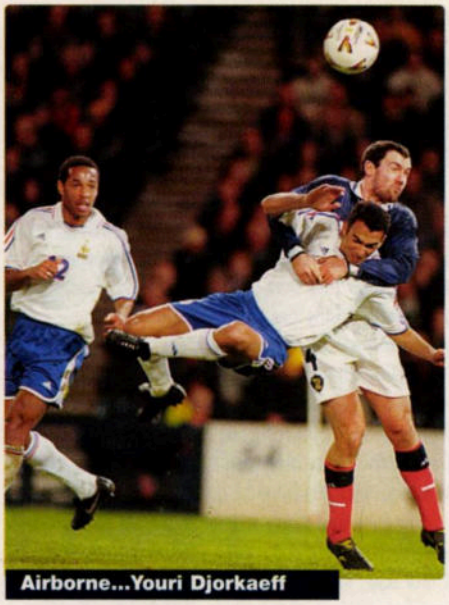
Airborne...Youri Djorkaeff

For the record

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

GROUP 4		
05.09.98	Iceland-France	1-1
10.10.98	Russia-France	2-3
14.10.98	France-Andorra	2-0
27.03.99	France-Ukraine	0-0
31.03.99	France-Armenia	2-0
05.06.99	France-Russia	2-3
09.06.99	Andorra-France	0-1
04.09.99	Ukraine-France	0-0
08.09.99	Armenia-France	2-3
09.10.99	France-Iceland	3-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France*	10	6	3	1	17	10	21
Ukraine	10	5	5	0	14	4	20
Russia	10	6	1	3	22	12	19
Iceland	10	4	3	3	12	7	15
Armenia	10	2	2	6	8	15	8
Andorra	10	0	0	10	3	28	0

**France qualified as group winners*

OTHER RESULTS SINCE SUMMER 1999

18.08.99	Northern Ireland-France (friendly)	0-1
13.11.99	France-Croatia (friendly)	3-0
23.02.00	France-Poland (friendly)	1-0
29.03.00	Scotland-France (friendly)	0-2
26.04.00	France-Slovenia (friendly)	3-2

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS RECORD

1960	4th place
1964	Quarter-finalists
1968	Quarter-finalists
1972	Did not qualify
1976	Did not qualify
1980	Did not qualify
1984	Winners
1988	Did not qualify
1992	Group stage
1996	Semi-finalists

QUESTIONS TO THE COACH
Roger Lemerre

What are your strengths going into this tournament?
One of the great strengths of this French team is its cohesion. The atmosphere within the national team is like that at a club. Everyone gets on so well, there are no egos or cliques. There is a great well of experience in my squad and we have players who are in demand all over Europe.

In terms of technique and athleticism, we don't have to envy anyone. For a long time, this team has been very capable defensively, but now I believe our attacking play is developing in the right way too.

The selection of Christian Karembeu was a surprise as he has not been playing regularly for Real Madrid.
I've never said that a player has to be a regular first-choice with his club to be picked for the national team.

After winning the World Cup, are you still able to motivate your squad?
What makes me feel confident about our chances in the finals is the ambition and hunger I sense in the players. It was not enough to win the World Cup; they want more success. This France team has never been in the comfort zone. Every opponent tries doubly hard to defeat the world champions, but this represents a challenge which the players never tire of taking up. We need fear no one.

You have stuck with much of the World Cup squad, haven't you?
Yes, but there are no privileges for the players who helped us become world champions. If many of them are still in the squad, it's because they deserve to be. It's tough on those pretenders, but they have the hard task of trying to displace a brilliant generation.

What is your future after the tournament?
I don't have any personal ambition. Only success for the team matters.

How do you see the tournament for France?
Euro 2000 is very important for France. A good performance in Holland and Belgium will set us up well for the defence of our world title in 2002. Euro 2000 will be our last taste of competitive action for a while and we must make the most of it. Remember, we don't have to qualify for the 2002 World Cup and will only have friendlies to prepare for it.

How did you arrive at your final 22 players?
I don't deal in hypotheses and fiction. I work only in terms of the reality of the moment. When selecting my squad, I'm slowly but surely putting together a puzzle and all the players know where they stand with me.

Equal partners...France have no ego problems or cliques

AT WWW.WORLDSOCCER.COM

Wait and see

Holland's chances can be truly assessed only when the finals get under way, writes Klaas-Jan Droppert

On the ball...Patrick Kluivert tangles with Germany's Markus Babbel

EURO 2000 is the biggest sporting event the Dutch have hosted since the Amsterdam Olympics in 1928, and its success depends largely on the performance of their national team.

But with the tournament in sight, it is still hard to tell whether Frank Rijkaard's brigade will finish top or will flop. Despite the unlimited confidence of players and fans, results and performances in a series of warm-up matches have not been very satisfying. Indeed, Holland's 2-1 victory over arch-rivals Germany in February ended an 11-game, 18-month streak without a win.

Germany always bring out the best in the Dutch, and on that night in Amsterdam they showed their enormous potential for the first time since France 98.

The margin of victory should have been much greater because Holland outplayed their well-respected opponents. For once, skills, creativity, workrate and the will to win all came together as the Dutch showed why they are favourites to win Euro 2000.

However, the performance was a mere flash in the pan. The next two friendlies, against Belgium away and Scotland at home, both draws, saw the Dutch return to their indifferent ways.

Why is it so difficult to predict whether Holland will play an important role at Euro 2000? The main reason is that Rijkaard has continued to experiment, trying something different in every match.

His aim is to study what his players are capable of in unusual situations or positions, to confront them with their strengths and weaknesses. That explains the line-up in those two most recent friendlies. In Brussels he tried a 3-4-3 system for the first time. But the experiment failed because his team were taken aback by the aggressive play of the Belgians. Holland were struggling and centre-back Winston Bogarde, debutant wing-back Paul Bosvelt and right-winger Roy Makaay looked especially uncomfortable as part of this system.

The next match, against a very defensive Scottish side, wasn't much better, even though Rijkaard switched to the regular 4-4-2 system. However, he didn't opt to play his first team, giving several players the chance to prove why they should be part of his starting line-up. Scotland's lack of ideas allowed defenders Arthur Numan, Andre Ooijer and Bert Konterman, as well as controlling midfielder Bosvelt, to turn in comfortable performances. But up front, Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink and Makaay failed to impress.

Rijkaard was asked if his Euro 2000 squad had selected itself as a result of the performance against the Scots. He wasn't amused, saying that he would pick his final 22 only at a late stage.

Rijkaard had every reason to avoid openly criticising players such as Hasselbaink and Makaay. A few days later it became clear that one of his stars would be missing out on the finals, when Ruud Van Nistelrooy suffered a recurrence of a troublesome knee injury.

This left Rijkaard with a serious problem. Even though Holland are the only team at Euro 2000 who can call upon no fewer than six international strikers, Rijkaard was relying on Van Nistelrooy, despite the fact that before his latest injury he hadn't played for two months. With Dennis Bergkamp still lacking form, the PSV striker was the perfect stand-in to partner Patrick Kluivert. After all, against Germany, Bergkamp was left on the bench in favour of Van Nistelrooy and his partnership with Kluivert looked promising.

'Rijkaard has tried something different in every match, studying how his players cope'

Now Rijkaard is forced to use strikers he had written off. With Bergkamp struggling and Pierre Van Hooijdonk to be used only as a supersub, Hasselbaink and Makaay will get another chance. It will be interesting to see what the Deportivo La Coruna top scorer can do up front. So far, Makaay has been used only on the right flank.

But Holland's chances cannot truly be put into perspective until June 11, the day of the team's first Euro 2000 match, against the Czech Republic. The general opinion is that Rijkaard will bend the team to his will in the pre-tournament training camp. Only then will the players become focused on Euro 2000. That's the time to prove they have merely been following an old Dutch tradition of being below-par in preparation matches but impressing the world when it matters.

★ Star Man
Edgar Davids

THE highest skyscraper in Rotterdam is adorned by a massive reproduction of the 'Dutch Pitbull', Edgar Davids, shown running straight at the building on one side and emerging on the other.

Typical Davids: any other player would have gone round. But he towers like King Kong over the city that will host the Final of Euro 2000. Not Dennis Bergkamp, not Patrick Kluivert, but Davids, the most popular footballer in Holland today.

Two years ago, before the 1998 World Cup, that would have been unthinkable. Then, Davids had just returned to the side after storming out of their hotel at St Albans during Euro 96, snarling obscenities about the coach, Guus Hiddink.

Davids began the World Cup on the bench. When Holland drew their first game 0-0 with Belgium, I mentioned to a Dutch TV anchorman that it might be time to give Davids a chance. "Davids?" he replied, aghast. "Certainly not!"

Yet Davids started the next game, against South Korea. He excelled, Holland won 5-0 and there has never been a question of dropping him since. The current Dutch coach, Frank Rijkaard, has even made him vice-captain.

The Dutch know how much they need Davids. Holland have long been a team of ideal sons-in-law: pretty footballers who never win anything. Davids, however, is a throwback to the great Johan Neeskens. He grew up on videotapes of Diego Maradona and Gerald Vanenburg, but eventually realised that he would never succeed as a technician alone, so turned himself into a fighter.

Davids conceded more free-kicks than anyone else at France 98, and he picks up cards like a dealer in a casino. But the Dutch love him for it. Johan Cruyff has said: "Davids provides emotion, fire. Holland absolutely needs that fire to go further."

On the pitch, the Juventus man still breathes fire, but off it he has mellowed. He used to have to fight for respect. That day in St Albans he was 23, receiving a measly salary from Ajax, in and out of the national side, and fresh from the Amsterdam ghetto. Today he is 27, a multi-millionaire, on top of the hierarchy at Juve and Holland, and living like a prince in Turin. Now they respect him.

"He has more passion in his right toe than other internationals in both legs," says Hiddink; "He's a one-man machine-room," says Inter coach Marcello Lippi; "Davids is a man who during the match tows the rest of the team along," says Rijkaard.

Davids also stars in the new Nike adverts. To a man obsessed with respect, that matters. And if the Dutch win Euro 2000, they probably will stick him on top of Amsterdam's Royal Palace.

Simon Kuper

Driving force...Edgar Davids

HOLLAND

How they line up

FOR ALL his experimentation during the build-up period, coach Frank Rijkaard will opt for a 4-4-2 formation, deploying virtually the same players who reached the semi-finals of France 98.

In goal **Edwin Van der Sar** is the undisputed No 1, while **Frank De Boer** and **Jaap Stam** will play in central defence. In midfield **Edgar Davids** is the key player. His technique and fighting spirit are crucial to the team's overall performance. Up front, **Patrick Kluivert** is a certain starter.

As far as the remaining positions are concerned, Rijkaard will probably decide to use true defenders on the flanks instead of attack-minded midfielders as he did in a few of the friendlies.

Michael Reiziger will play at right-back, despite being out of the team in recent games, with **Andre Ooijer** as his understudy. At left-back **Arthur Numan** will probably get the nod over **Winston Bogarde**, while left-footed midfielders **Boudewijn Zenden**, **Giovanni Van Bronckhorst** and **Philip Cocu** are also candidates.

In central defence Cocu is a stand-in for Frank De Boer, while Bogarde and **Bert Konterman** could play in Stam's position. Rijkaard always prefers to use left-and right-footed defenders, giving Holland more possibilities in the build-up.

Assuming that Cocu is not called on in any other position, he will probably partner Davids in central midfield. Rijkaard can also use **Clarence Seedorf**, although he has a tendency to go his own way rather than sticking to the role assigned to him. Even so, Rijkaard continues to show faith in him. Other options are **Ronald De Boer**, Van Bronckhorst and Feyenoord's **Paul Bosvelt**.

On the left, Rijkaard will use a deep-lying winger. **Marc Overmars** and Zenden are the main candidates, while Van Bronckhorst and Cocu offer more controlling alternatives for the left side. Rijkaard also wants a deep-lying winger on the right, and could switch either Overmars or Zenden to their less familiar flank, although this is one of the few options he hasn't tried so far. Heerenveen's **Jeffrey Talan** has been knocking on the door for this position. Against Belgium he performed well as a substitute, though he does lack experience.

Up front, Kluivert is normally partnered by **Dennis Bergkamp**, although the Arsenal player has been out of form recently. It isn't the first time that Bergkamp's ability to contribute has been questioned on the eve of a tournament, but previously he has proved his worth once the competition has got under way.

Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink isn't the perfect candidate to partner Kluivert, and though **Roy Makaay** looks a better bet, he hasn't been used as a striker so far. Other candidates for the forward line are Ronald De Boer and **Pierre Van Hooijdonk**, with the latter likely to keep his role as supersub.

Rijkaard has further options to adapt his team according to the way the opposition line up. For instance, **Aron Winter** can be positioned just in front of the centre-backs to stifle the opposition's attacking midfielder or third striker.

> 'Edgar Davids is the key player. His technique and fighting spirit are crucial to Holland's performance'

Squad pool

	Club	Age	Caps	Gls
GOALKEEPERS				
Ed DE GOEY	Chelsea (Eng)	33	31	0
Edwin VAN DER SAR	Juventus (Ita)	29	45	0
Sander WESTERVELD	Liverpool (Eng)	25	2	0
DEFENDERS				
Winston BOGARDE	Barcelona (Spa)	29	19	0
Frank DE BOER	Barcelona (Spa)	30	74	6
Bert KONTERMAN	Feyenoord	29	8	0
Arthur NUMAN	Rangers (Sco)	30	38	0
Andre OOIJER	PSV Eindhoven	25	3	0
Michael REIZIGER	Barcelona (Spa)	27	39	1
Jaap STAM	Manchester Utd (Eng)	27	30	3
MIDFIELDERS				
Paul BOSVELT	Feyenoord	30	2	0
Philip COCU	Barcelona (Spa)	29	39	4
Edgar DAVIDS	Juventus (Ita)	27	29	4
Ronald DE BOER	Barcelona (Spa)	30	57	12
Marc OVERMARS	Arsenal (Eng)	27	54	10
Clarence SEEDORF	Internazionale (Ita)	24	46	7
Jeffrey TALAN	Heerenveen	28	5	0
Giovanni VAN BRONCKHORST	Rangers (Sco)	25	15	1
Aron WINTER	Ajax Amsterdam	33	79	6
Boudewijn ZENDEN	Barcelona (Spa)	23	19	3
FORWARDS				
Dennis BERGKAMP	Arsenal (Eng)	31	72	36
Jimmy Floyd HASSELBAINK	Atletico Madrid (Spa)	28	8	2
Patrick KLUIVERT	Barcelona (Spa)	23	38	20
Roy MAKAAY	La Coruna (Spa)	25	5	0
Pierre VAN HOOIJDONK	Vitesse Arnhem	30	18	7
Peter VAN VOSSEN	Feyenoord	32	27	9

The view from Holland

Jan Hermen de Bruijn
Editor of Elf football magazine
"Holland's chances of winning the tournament are bright. They have a strong squad and home advantage. But the majority of the players, especially those from Barcelona, have never learned how to fight. Let's hope the Premier League delegation and Edgar Davids will add this key element to the team. This is absolutely vital because Holland are playing in the toughest group. If they don't succeed, their tournament could end in a major disappointment.

"I'm not worried about Frank Rijkaard, he has impressed me more and more. He is an acceptable coach to all the top players in the squad, no matter their race or opinion. Rijkaard is also strong enough to make harsh decisions."

Wim Kieft
Former PSV and Holland player, now an analyst for Canal Plus
"Holland are favourites for the obvious reasons such as home advantage and the

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potential of the side, but the big question is: can they cope with the pressure? Actually, they should, because they have very experienced players performing in Europe's biggest Leagues.

"It's true that their preparation has not been very successful. But to be honest, that means nothing. These players are playing so many matches during the season, it's impossible to give 100 per cent in every game. But when things matter, they will be there.

"Whether Frank Rijkaard is capable of doing the job remains to be seen. We have to wait until the tournament, when he is dealing with real pressure. So far he has made a good impression. He is resolute and you can see he has vision.

"Holland's biggest opponents will be France and Spain, because these are the quality teams. And Italy always play well at big tournaments.

"The team with the tournament's top scorer will be the winners. For Holland this should be Patrick Kluivert. He can do it – and it's high time he made a real impact on the big stage."

For the record

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

As co-hosts

RESULTS SINCE FRANCE 98

10.10.98	Holland-Peru (friendly)	2-0
13.10.98	Holland-Ghana (friendly)	0-0
18.11.98	Germany-Holland (friendly)	1-1
10.02.99	Portugal-Holland (friendly)	0-0
31.03.99	Holland-Argentina (friendly)	1-1
28.04.99	Holland-Morocco (friendly)	1-2
05.06.99	Brazil-Holland (friendly)	2-2
08.06.99	Brazil-Holland (friendly)	3-1
18.08.99	Denmark-Holland (friendly)	0-0
04.09.99	Holland-Belgium (friendly)	5-5
09.10.99	Holland-Brazil (friendly)	2-2
13.11.99	Holland-Czech Republic (friendly)	1-1
23.02.00	Holland-Germany (friendly)	2-1
29.03.00	Belgium-Holland (friendly)	2-2
26.04.00	Holland-Scotland (friendly)	0-0

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS RECORD

1960	Did not enter
1964	2nd round (no qualifying stage)
1968	Did not qualify
1972	Did not qualify
1976	3rd place
1980	Group stage
1984	Did not qualify
1988	Winners
1992	Semi-finalists
1996	Quarter-finalists

QUESTIONS TO THE COACH
Frank Rijkaard

Who are your favourites to win Euro 2000, and why?
There are many favourites as this is a tournament in which anybody can beat anybody. There will be surprises all over. So it's difficult to name favourites. You have world champions France, they should be favourites. Then there is the Czech Republic, who finished second in 1996. They qualified without dropping any points. Spain are favourites, surely, if you look at their quality at club level. They had three clubs in the semi-finals of the Champions League. Then there are still the traditional powers like England, Germany and Italy. And, of course, Holland and Belgium as home teams.

Who will be the star players?
This is even more difficult to say. The moment you name names, it's as sure that others will become the big stars. You never really know. But of course there are star players in Holland, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, England. Names that pop up are Raul and Beckham. But it's difficult to make a real prediction.

Who will be the surprises, and why? Who will be the most surprising youngsters?
My answer is about the same as the previous one. It's difficult to say. Who, outside England, expected Michael Owen to explode the way he did in France 98?

How do you rate the chances of your team? What stage can they reach?
If everything goes as planned, we will reach the Final. That is also our goal. We want to go all the way. But, of course, whether you succeed depends also on luck, injuries, suspensions, possible mistakes by referees. And then there are the opponents who in the end might simply prove to be better on the day. Still, it is our goal to become European champions. And we have the capabilities to do just that.

How is your team preparation? Do you have enough time? Are you happy with it?
So far we have tried many things, but the real preparation only started on May 23, although some players were still missing due to club matches.

What would you suggest to the referees?
The most important thing is that they follow the rules as they are, without exception. It must be clear what is allowed and what is not – for players, coaches and also for the fans. The best referees in Europe come to Euro 2000, so this part of the tournament should be well accounted for.

Which will be, generally speaking, the tactical habits and the tactical novelties? Will it be offensive or defensive?
I expect no changes. The tournament will follow the developments that have taken place in the last few years. Everybody knows everything about everybody, you cannot surprise your opponents any more. So in matches the small details will determine what happens.

How do you see each group at Euro 2000?
No group is really stronger or weaker than the other. This is not a World Cup where, occasionally, you have countries that are weaker than the others. Here, it's impossible to predict the outcome of the groups.

Do you think the fact that Holland and Belgium are co-hosting Euro 2000 will have more advantages or more disadvantages, and in which areas?
It is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It's an advantage because you have the support of the fans. But this is also a disadvantage because the pressure on the players is far bigger. Then again for the players what is expected of them is clearer. Playing at home is also an advantage when it comes to logistics. If there is a problem, it can be solved more quickly.

Another disadvantage is that the players will be isolated during the tournament. When we were in Monaco at France 98, it was possible to go sightseeing. That's impossible now. As soon as you leave camp you will be hunted by media and fans. So this means more pressure.

Do you think hooliganism will create problems?
I haven't really thought much about that problem. I just hope that Euro 2000 will be a triumph for everybody that sincerely loves football. I hope that everybody uses common sense. I have full confidence in the people in charge of security. They've been working on this for quite some time now and they know what they are doing. But it's clear what happened before the Galatasaray-Leeds United game and later in Copenhagen is a warning for us all.